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FAME AND FORTUNE

Stories of
BOYS

WEEKLY.

Who make
MONEY.

A HARVEST OF GOLD; OR, THE BURIED TREASURE OF CORAL ISLAND.

By A SELF MADE MAN.



Paul and Andy advanced upon the motionless figure. "Great Scott!" exclaimed Prescott, when he got close enough to look the grewsome object squarely in the face. "It's a skeleton!" "A skeleton!" palpitated Andy, turning pale. "Oh lor', so it is!"

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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A HARVEST OF GOLD

OR,

THE BURIED TREASURE OF CORAL ISLAND

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH BELL.

Boom!—Boom!—Boom!

The sombre note of a deep-toned bell, thrice repeated, at intervals of exactly fifteen seconds, smote upon the blustering night air, and the dull sound, caught by the wind, was borne for a mile down the winding, country road to the ears of three persons in a light wagon, two of whom were boys, that was rattling along at a rapid rate in the direction whence the bell note had come.

"What's that, John?" asked the elder of the two boys—a fine, handsome young fellow, of athletic build, known for many miles around in that neighborhood as Paul Prescott, the only son and heir of George Prescott, a retired merchant, of Prescott's Roost, West Newbury, Mass.

The old man, he was all of eighty, but hale and strong for his age, who drove the team of bays, shook his head solemnly, while a shiver ran through his frame, and a look of sadness gathered upon his countenance.

He seemed instinctively to understand what the sound portended.

He recognized in it the death-knell of Mr. Prescott, the father of the lad who had just spoken, and he believed, as firmly as if the words had been spoken in his ear, that the boy in question was now an orphan.

There was a mystery about that bell that no one had ever been able to fathom.

It hung in a small, weather-scarred belfry above the roof of Prescott's Roost, between the twin, ivy-clad stone towers that formed a picturesque effect to the front of the house facing the road.

That section of the building was said to be over 200 years old, and had a history.

When Mr. Prescott came into possession of the property, all but the front part of the ancient structure was in a state of ruin and decay.

It was surrounded by fifty acres of land, and he got it at a bargain.

Instead of razing the whole of the old building, the new owner rebuilt it on its former lines, leaving the original front as it was, for the romantic aspect of the ivy-covered towers and castellated entrance appealed to his artistic eye.

The crumbling bell-tower, with its solid-looking iron bell, so rusted to its fastenings that no two men could stir it from its perpendicular position, was permitted to remain.

There was a legend in the neighborhood that when the former owners of the house died, one by one, the old bell rang out three times at the moment each breathed their last.

This creepy tradition was told to Mr. Prescott, but he placed little faith in it till he was startled by the thrice-repeated sound of the bell at the moment of his wife's death, five years later.

No natural cause could be assigned to so singular a coincidence, hence from that time the mystery that hung about the bell tower deepened, and the conviction was widespread among those of a superstitious turn of mind that the bell

would surely ring again when another member of the family died.

One summer evening at dusk, about three months later, the bell boomed out its three solemn notes once more.

It was heard two miles away, for the night was still, and gave rise to much speculation as to whether Mr. Prescott or his son Paul, neither of whom was known to be ill, had died suddenly from some unexpected cause.

The two in question were sitting on the rear porch in perfect health at the moment the mysterious note floated out, and when that fact became known it looked as if the bell had rung a false alarm.

A letter received a week later by Mr. Prescott, however, conveyed the intelligence of his only sister's death at the very hour that the bell had spoken, and that confirmed the gruesome record of the mysterious bell.

A week before our story opens, Mr. Prescott had been taken seriously ill.

At the time, his son Paul was away from home at a boarding-school in the suburbs of Gloucester.

Faber Prescott, Paul's uncle, and the black sheep of the family, was stopping at the Roost on a brief visit, at his own invitation.

He was a man whose inclinations were altogether opposite to those of his successful brother George.

He led a rapid, and, to some extent, a questionable life, and consequently was nearly always on the ragged edge of fortune.

He was now a widower, with one son, seventeen years old, named Henry.

The boy was very like his father in many respects, and those respects were not to his credit.

He occasionally visited the Roost at his Uncle George's request, but he and his cousin Paul never got on well together.

They could assimilate no better than oil and water.

As soon as the owner of the Roost was taken sick, Faber proceeded to boss the ranch in a way that did not add to his popularity in the household.

From the first George Prescott seemed to have a premonition that he wasn't going to live long, and had requested his brother to send for Paul, but that gentleman took his time about doing it.

In fact, strange to say, the first message he sent was to his son Henry, telling him to come on to the Roost.

Finally George Prescott, who had reason to distrust his brother, wondering why his son failed to come home, put the matter in the hands of an old and valued employe named Tom Hazard, whom he had brought to live at the Roost, and Tom saw to it that Paul was immediately notified that his presence was desired at home on account of his father's illness.

Paul left the school at once and started for home in a rather uneasy state of mind.

He had to take a train from Gloucester to Danversport in order to connect with the Boston & Maine for Newburyport.

From that town he had to change to a branch line that stopped at Byfield, the nearest point to his home.

He was astonished to meet his cousin Henry getting out of the B. & M. train at Newburyport, and to learn that he, too, was bound for the Roost.

At such a time Henry's company was even less congenial than usual to him, but he put the best face he could on the matter, and tried to be friendly during the short run from Newburyport to Byfield, where they were met by old John Barnes, the coachman, with a fast team, who had been told by Faber Prescott to look out for his son if he came by that train.

When the fateful bell rang out its death note, the party were within a mile of the Roost.

It was a dark, windy night, with the chill of the late fall in the air, and the boys found their overcoats very serviceable.

Although Paul well knew the dread significance of the three mysterious notes of the belfry bell, the sound had not come with sufficient distinctness to his ears to enable him to identify them.

It was different with John Barnes.

He was very superstitious, and he seemed to identify the warning at once.

"What do you suppose that sound was, John?" asked Paul, again, seeing that the old man did not answer when first addressed.

"Nothin' much, Master Paul," he replied, in a choked voice, not having the heart to tell the truth, and bring the grief of anticipated misfortune to the lad's heart.

"Time enough for that when he gets home and learns the truth," he muttered to himself, no longer taking an interest in the speed of the team, which was now bearing them, as he believed, to the house of death.

The team was now drawing near a cross-road, which led down to the Merrimac River.

Just as they reached it the shrill scream of a girl broke upon their ears with a suddenness and intensity that startled them greatly and caused old John to rein in the horses.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Paul, starting up from his seat, and gazing fixedly in the direction the sound had come. "Some one is in trouble."

As he spoke a shadow loomed up in the cross-roads, to the left, and flitted toward them, followed by another and larger shadow, which detached itself from the obscurity behind, and seemed to be chasing the first.

"Save me! oh, save me!" came in piteous accents from the first shadow, which speedily resolved itself into a young girl.

"Stop, ye little vixen!" roared the second shadow, "or I'll flay yer alive when I get my hands on you!"

An appeal for help was never wasted on Paul Prescott.

And when that appeal came from a defenceless girl, all the chivalry of his nature responded in a moment.

He did not stop to inquire into the merits of the case.

It was enough for him that one of the weaker sex stood in urgent need of assistance, and he acted at once.

Springing to the ground, he ran toward the girl, who, in another moment, fell, exhausted, into his arms.

He caught and held her just as her pursuer came up.

"Right ye are, young fellow," said the man, in a tone of satisfaction, advancing to grab the girl. "She gave me the slip from the schooner more'n an hour ago, and led me a pretty dance after her up the road; but I'll fix her when I get her back, or my old woman will, which is all the same. I'll be bound she won't light out no more after this."

"Hold on," said Paul, stepping between him and the girl. "What has she done to you, and why should you be chasing her at this hour of the night, along a lonely road?"

"Didn't I jest tell ye that she lighted out from my schooner?" retorted the man, angrily.

"Don't let him take me back!" cried the girl, recovering her breath and clinging desperately to her young protector. "He's a brute, and so is his wife. They've done nothing but beat me since I came to live with them, three months ago."

"Oh, I'm a brute, am I?" roared the man, savagely. "Ye'll pay well for that as soon as ye're back on board."

He made a swoop at her, but Paul headed him off.

"None of that, I say!" cried the plucky boy. "I won't stand by and see any girl ill-treated by a big fellow like you."

"What have ye got to say about it, anyway?" snarled the man. "Ye hain't got no right to interfere in my business."

He came closer to Paul, in a threatening way, and then the boy noticed that he wore a green shade over his right eye, and was altogether about as unsatisfactory-looking as one would care to meet alone on a highway.

"Well," replied Paul, stoutly, "as this girl has claimed my protection, she's going to have it. When she called you a brute, she didn't tell more than the truth, for your talk and actions toward her prove it."

"Blast yer!" yelled the man, springing at him.

But Paul was a stout boy and fully prepared for this demonstration on his part.

While he was no match at all for the man in strength, he outclassed the rascal in alertness and activity.

He was fully aroused to the situation, and made no bones about landing a heavy swing on the fellow's jaw as he side-stepped to avoid his attack.

What would have been the ultimate result of the scrap we cannot say.

Probably it might have gone hard with Paul, for the ruffian was now aroused to a blind kind of fury.

But at this point old John Barnes deemed it to be his duty to interfere, and he did it, with the butt of his whip.

There were several ounces of lead in it, and when it lighted across the forehead of the rascal he went down in the road, like a stricken ox.

He was partially stunned, but Paul saw that he would soon come to.

"Come, young lady," he said, "let me help you into

the wagon. You shall go to my home with me and stop there to-night. In the morning you can decide what you had best do to keep clear of your persecutors."

The girl uttered no objection, in fact she seemed glad to get as far away from the man who now lay in the dust of the road as possible, and permitted Paul to help her up on the seat he had vacated to go to her assistance.

"Get on the front seat with John, Henry," asked Paul, "so I can look after this young lady."

Henry, nothing loath, changed his seat, and soon the wagon was speeding on again, leaving the ruffian behind to pick himself up and retire from the scene.

CHAPTER II.

DOLLY CURTIS.

"What is your name, miss?" asked Paul, regarding the girl he had rescued with much interest; for despite her shabby attire, he easily saw that she was remarkably pretty, as well as interesting.

"Dolly Curtis," she answered, in a low, somewhat restrained tone, as she glanced rather timidly at the stalwart lad by her side, to whom she owed so much.

"Thank you," he said. "And I suppose you would like to know who I am?"

"If you will tell me," she replied, with another glance in his face, the Grecian beauty of which apparently impressed her.

"Well, my name is Paul Prescott, and I live at Prescott's Roost, only a short distance from here. I have been at school near Gloucester, and have just been called home by my father's illness. It was lucky for you, I guess, that we came along when we did."

"It was," she answered, "and I shall never forget what you have done for me as long as I live."

"That's all right," he answered, lightly. "You don't suppose that any decent fellow would have given you up to that ruffian if he could have helped? At any rate, I would not."

"How strong and brave you are!" she exclaimed, admiringly.

"Thank you for the compliment, Miss Dolly," he said, in a pleased tone. "Whatever you may decide on doing to-morrow I hope we shall see more of each other than just this brief acquaintance. I should like to be of further service to you if I could. If I can be, don't hesitate to ask me. Now, won't you?"

The girl blushed and looked down, under his ardent gaze, and finally said she did not know what she was going to do, as she was an orphan, without home or friends.

"Well, you must let me be your friend, Miss Dolly," said Paul. "Then you won't stand in need of one as long as I'm around. As for a home, if you're willing to make yourself useful, I guess our housekeeper can find enough to keep you busy at the Roost."

Dolly expressed her gratitude to Paul for his offer, and

said she would be glad if the housekeeper would take her on trial.

"Then, that is settled," said Paul, in a tone of satisfaction. "Now, tell me how came you to be connected with that rascal from whom I rescued you. Who is he, anyway? He spoke about a schooner—is he the skipper of one?"

"Yes. His name is Joel Grinnidge. He is captain of the schooner *Lively Polly*, and makes regular trips between Glo'ster and Nassau, on the Merrimac River. He lives, when on shore, at Glo'ster, and I went to live with Mrs. Grinnidge when my aunt died, six months ago. Mrs. Grinnidge was not kind to me, and made me work hard. In fact, I was little better than a slave. I told her I meant to leave her at the end of the month. Then she locked me in a room and beat me dreadfully."

"She did" exclaimed Paul, indignantly.

"Yes. She kept me a prisoner until her husband returned from his trip, and then he swore he'd be the death of me if I dared to leave. He said he'd find me wherever I went, and would drag me back and half kill me. When the schooner was ready to sail for Nassau again, Mrs. Grinnidge decided to go and see some relatives she has in New Hampshire, and she took me aboard the schooner with her yesterday afternoon, just before she sailed. Captain Grinnidge struck me this morning for some little thing, and swore at me in a terrible way. This evening, Mrs. Grinnidge found fault with me because I accidentally broke a plate when removing the dishes to the galley, and attacked me with a stick. The schooner happened to be tied to a wharf at the town yonder, and I fled ashore and ran up the road without knowing or caring where I went. All I wanted was to get away from my persecutors. The captain followed me as soon as he found out that I had escaped from the schooner, and I hid from him by the roadside. When he went up a lane to see if I had gone toward the house nearby, I ran on again. Finally it grew dark and I got confused and frightened, finding myself alone on a dreary road. While wondering what I was going to do, Captain Grinnidge came up and almost caught me. I screamed and ran ahead as fast as I could. Then I saw this wagon and you, and I begged you to protect me. And you did, and I shall be grateful to you forever."

"Well, don't worry any more. Captain Grinnidge won't dare come for you at my father's home. If he does he'll get fired out into the road."

"I never want to see him or Mrs. Grinnidge again. They are dreadfully cruel people. I will work very hard to please your housekeeper if she will let me stay at your home for awhile at any rate."

"You'll stay all right. I'll make it plain to Mrs. Gray that I want you to remain, and that will settle it. You'll find her all right. Just do your best to help her, and I guess she'll take a liking to you, for she's just lost a daughter about your age that she thought the world of."

"I will do my best," answered Dolly, earnestly.

"John," said Paul, to the driver, "this is Miss Dolly Curtis. Introduce her to Mrs. Gray when we get home, and

tell her that it is my wish that she find something for her to do right along, as the girl has no place to go, or no friends. Tell her how we rescued her from a brute, who may possibly try to regain her. His name is Captain Joel Grinnidge. If he comes to the Roost after her he's to get the G. B. Understand?"

John understood, and promised to see that his young master's wishes were strictly attended to.

Henry Prescott had overheard much of the conversation which had taken place between his cousin Paul and Dolly Curtis, and he sniffed at the idea of so much attention being paid to a poor and common girl, as he sized up Dolly.

"She's nothing but a pauper and a servant," he sneered to himself. "Paul must be crazy to treat her as if she was as good as himself. Low people like her ought to be kept in their place, otherwise they put on airs, and get to think they are somebodies. Paul is always putting himself out of the way to oblige some Tom, Dick or Harry. If I stood in his shoes, with all the property that's coming to him, you can bet I'd let folks know who I was. They'd take their hats off to me every time, you can gamble on that."

Although he sneered at Dolly on account of her forlorn and friendless condition, he was rather taken by her fresh beauty and engaging manners.

He decided that he would do her the honor of being friendly with her in a patronizing way.

Naturally, she would appreciate his condescension, be proud to be seen talking with him, and that would flatter his own sense of superiority.

He felt sure his father wouldn't have sent for him unless he intended to remain some time at the Roost.

He hoped it would be a long time, for he never was accustomed to live as well, or have so soft a snap, as when he was domiciled at the Prescott home.

The fact that his uncle was very ill, and might even die, did not bother him any.

He was not at all grateful for past favors from that same uncle.

He accepted them more as a right to which he was entitled than anything else.

In fact, he reasoned that it would be much to his father's and his own benefit if his uncle did die.

In such an event he figured that his father would become the acting master of the Roost until Paul came of age, a matter of three years, and during that time they would certainly live on the fat of the land, and he himself would then enjoy as many privileges, perhaps more, as his cousin.

Yes, on the whole, it would be advantageous to him if George Prescott never got well, and perhaps he hoped that such would be the outcome.

CHAPTER III.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

About the time that the two boys left the Byfield station in the wagon, en route for Prescott's Roost, matters of moment were transpiring at Paul's home.

Faber Prescott, instead of being at his brother's beside, as he ought to have been, considering the serious condition of that brother, was in the library doing things that he had no business to do.

He was industriously searching the drawers and pigeon-holes of his brother's desk, and prying into matters not intended for his eye.

He was hunting for one thing in particular—his brother's will.

In some way he had become aware that it was in the house, and he was looking into all the most likely places where such an article might be expected to be kept.

There was a strong safe in the house, set in the wall of the dining-room, where the silverware and other valuable articles were kept, the combination of which was known to only one person beside the owner, and that was Tom Hazard, who performed some of the duties of a butler.

Faber Prescott, of course, knew about this safe, and had a general notion as to its contents, but he did not know that his brother kept his valuable documents in a small, inner compartment of this strong, steel box.

Had his business instincts been reasonably developed he might have guessed the facts of the case, but Faber was impressed with the idea that all men keep their papers either in their desks, or in some secret drawer or box in their library or sleeping-room.

Had there been a small safe in either of these rooms his thoughts would have turned to it.

As there was none, he proceeded to make a thorough investigation on the lines that ran in his mind.

Of course, it was a very high-handed proceeding on his part to search for his brother's will, but, then, he had a strong object in doing so.

Evidently, he believed that his brother had not long to live.

While he was thus employed, his place in the sick-room was filled by Tom Hazard.

Had he known what was transpiring there he certainly would have found some excuse of getting Tom out of the room.

"Tom, I am afraid I shan't survive this night," George Prescott was saying to his faithful attendant; "but if I live long enough to see my dear boy once more I shall die contented."

Tom bowed his head in real grief, for Mr. Prescott had been a kind and considerate employer during the thirty years he had worked for the owner of the Roost.

He easily saw that the stamp of death was on Prescott's face, and did not doubt but his tenure of life was brief.

"It is a humiliating confession for me to make, but it is a fact that my brother is not a man who can be trusted. His life has been a misspent one from boyhood up, and it is too much to expect that he can change at this late day. I have felt compelled to come to his financial relief more times than I care to recall in order to save the name of Prescott from disgrace at his hands. His presence here at this time, instead of being the blessing to me that it ought

to be, is, I fear, unfortunate. His actions during my illness have not pleased me. Had he sent for my son when I requested him to do so my boy would now be with me instead of miles away."

"Paul will surely be here within the hour, Mr. Prescott," Tom hastened to assure him. "Indeed, he must already be on his way home from the station."

"But for you, Tom, I fear he would yet have remained unnotified of my serious state, though it is five days since I asked my brother to send for him."

"It is a pity, then, that you did not tell me sooner that you wished to see him," said Tom. "I would have taken the responsibility of sending for him had I suspected that your illness was going to take such an unexpected turn."

"It is useless for us to consider now what might have been done. What I wish to say to you has far more weight. You're an old and valued employe, Tom. You served me faithfully in business for twenty-five years, and since I bought this place and settled down here, your services have been none the less valuable. I feel I can trust you, Tom."

"You can, indeed, sir."

"My brother will take charge of this place immediately that I am dead, but not for many days, for as soon as my will is read it will be seen that Mr. Harrison, my Boston lawyer, has been appointed my administrator, in conjunction with yourself, and that I have designated you as guardian of my son until he comes of age. I wish you to become for the time being a second father to my boy. Promise me you will."

"I will," replied Tom, in a choked voice.

"I know that you will, and trust you fully," said George Prescott, his voice growing weaker. "Be careful to guard him against my brother, for I fear Faber will be greatly angered when he discovers that he has been left out in the cold as far as the handling of my property is concerned, and that he may endeavor to revenge himself in some way on my son, notwithstanding the relationship he bears toward him."

"Your wishes shall be obeyed to the letter, sir," observed Tom, solemnly. "Your brother has already shown his hand in a way not at all relished by the members of this household, and I regret to confirm your opinion that it would have been an unwise move on your part to have taken him into your confidence with respect to your property and the future of Paul."

As Tom spoke, a curtain, which screened an alcove, was moved aside, and a dark, scowling countenance peered in upon the dying man and his faithful friend.

There was a similarity in looks between the man who lay helpless in bed and the man behind the curtain, yet the expression of their faces was different, for the influence of good and the influence of evil always leaves its traces on the human face.

They were brothers, and the man, whom we must call an interloper, was Faber Prescott.

"Ah!" he muttered, as he gazed at his dying brother, "it is as I supposed. You have taken means to defraud

me of my just right, and you have even gone so far as to warn this employe of yours against me, your own flesh and blood. A pretty brother you are, I must say," he added, sneeringly; "but do not imagine that I will quietly submit to play second fiddle, if by hook or crook I can defeat your amiable purpose. He laughs best who laughs last. We will see who holds the ace."

Unconscious that his undeserving brother was an unseen listener of their conversation, George Prescott went on.

"My will and other papers of value to my estate are deposited in the inner compartment of the safe below, of which you hold the combination, Tom. The key to the compartment is on the ring with other keys in the pocket of the trousers I last wore. Get that ring at once and guard that special key well. When Mr. Harrison arrives—you must telegraph him immediately after my death—open the safe and inner box in his presence and let him search among the papers for the will which he drew up for me some months ago. Then all will be well. Do you understand?"

"I do," replied Tom.

"It is well that I overheard this part of their confidential talk," muttered Faber Prescott, in the recess. "So the will is in the safe below, eh? And I never dreamed of that. No wonder I could not find it in the library. Well, perhaps, it is not yet too late to contrive some measure by which I can get possession of it before that lawyer arrives here."

"And now you know all I desired to tell you, Tom," continued the dying man. "I feel I am growing very weak. My breath and sight seem failing me. Why does not my boy come? A few minutes more and he will be too late—too late. Ah!"

The eyes of the dying man had suddenly rested on his brother's face, projected through the folds of the curtain, and a spasm of apprehension lest Faber had overheard their conversation struck upon his heart and startled him at a moment when such a shock could not prove otherwise than fatal.

"Tom—Tom!" he gasped. "Look—look—there! My broth—"

He half raised himself in bed and pointed at the alcove.

Tom Hazard, greatly startled himself, turned around and followed the indication of his arm, but saw nothing, for Faber Prescott had taken alarm and retreated from sight, and the curtain hung motionless as before he parted them.

"I see no one. You must have been mistaken," he said.

Then suddenly upon the night air came the measured boom of the bell in the belfry on the roof.

Boom!—Boom!—Boom!

"Great heaven!" cried Tom, in a hushed voice. "The death bell!"

He turned to look at his old employer, with a glance of apprehension.

His worst fears were realized.

George Prescott was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS GRASP.

Paul Prescott was overwhelmed with grief when he reached home and found that his father was dead.

Tom Hazard did his best to comfort him, but for a long time he did not succeed.

Faber Prescott greeted his nephew with a melancholy countenance, as though his brother's death was a great affliction to him, and assumed a particularly friendly attitude toward the lad.

Henry Prescott was very much surprised to learn of his uncle's death, but he was not particularly grief-stricken over that sad event.

His father had always misrepresented his brother to him, so that Henry had come to consider that George Prescott had not done the right thing by them.

He now felt certain that he and his father would take up their residence for some time to come at the Roost.

He also hoped that his uncle had left him something in his will.

"I dare say the governor will have charge of Paul after this, and I hope he will make him walk a chalk line until he's twenty-one. He's been accustomed to put on too many airs to suit me. I'd like to see him taken down a peg or two. I hate fellows who think themselves better than other people because their father is well off. I guess he'll find it convenient to change his tune now that he's an orphan."

Such were Henry Prescott's reflections as he sat by himself at a table in the dining-room, eating the supper that had been prepared for Paul, for the poor bereaved lad had no thought or appetite for the meal.

Henry's spirits were in no wise impaired by the solemn circumstances, and he greedily devoured the good things laid before him.

The fact that the cook had not expected him, and that the viands had been intended for his cousin, did not worry him greatly.

Faber Prescott, when he entered the chamber of death, immediately after his brother had expired, gave way to many expressions of profound grief, somewhat to the surprise of Tom Hazard, who was himself deeply moved.

The faithful employe of the dead man began to wonder if the black sheep of the family didn't have a heart after all.

In a short time Faber composed himself and then got Tom out of the room on an errand that was of no great importance.

As soon as Tom was out of the way, Faber made a quick search for the trousers he had last seen on his brother, and, finding them folded on a chair, went through the pockets with uncommon dexterity.

With a grunt of satisfaction he pulled out a ring full of keys.

"One of these is the key that fits the inner compartment of the safe," he muttered. "Now, which one is it? It won't do for me to take the whole bunch."

He carefully examined each one of the keys and finally came to the conclusion that the small, flat key was the right one.

He detached it from the ring, put it in his vest-pocket and returned the others to the pocket of the trousers, which he carefully replaced as they were before.

When Tom returned, after spreading the sad news among the servants, Faber was bending over his brother, with his handkerchief to his eyes.

He rose as soon as Tom appeared and walked with dejected mien from the room.

Going directly to the library, he sat down before his brother's desk and began to consider the situation from every point of view, figuring how he could nullify the adverse conditions that faced him.

"If I could manage to get hold of the will and destroy it, then the law would give me a certain standing next to the direct heir. I could probably insist on being appointed Paul's guardian because of my close relationship to him. What passed between my brother and this Tom Hazard would have no weight in court, because it could not be corroborated, and Lawyer Harrison's statement that he drew up a will for my brother, while it would be believed, would amount to little if the will was not produced. It is true that in the end Paul would succeed to the property as the heir-at-law, but I would be able to claim something, while as his guardian I should help myself to as much as sharp practice would admit of. The whole of my prospects hangs upon the disappearance of the will. That would be an easy matter to accomplish, now that I believe I have the key to the inner compartment of the safe, if I only possessed the combination which opens the door. Tom alone holds that now. If it were possible to bribe him. I fear that is out of the question. These faithful employes are too infernally honest. Perhaps I may be able to think up some scheme for forcing the secret from him—some way in which my agency would not be suspected. He who has the brain to contrive, and the will to execute, generally comes out on top."

The rattling of the wagon, bearing old John and the two boys, on the gravel carriage-path outside put an end, for the time being, to his plotting.

Next morning the news was carried about the neighborhood that George Prescott was dead.

Many who had heard the three notes of the mysterious death bell the night before, and who knew that the owner of the Roost was very ill, had already discounted the intelligence.

During the day the neighbors on terms of intimacy with the Prescotts called to offer their condolence.

Faber and his son had had a long interview after breakfast, and Henry was brought to view his father in a new light.

Whatever confidences passed between them, the boy fell in with his father's views, and having been instructed to keep a close watch on Tom Hazard's movements, faithfully carried out directions to the letter.

Consequently, when Tom started for Byfield at about ten o'clock to telegraph to Lawyer Harrison in Boston, Faber was at once informed of the fact.

"Has he gone, Henry?" asked his father.

"Just drove away in the light wagon," replied the boy.

"Very well. Now run and tell old John Barnes to saddle Black Bess for me, as I have a visit to make."

"Are you going to Byfield, father?" asked Henry, curiously.

"Why do you wish to know?" asked his father, sharply.

"Oh, nothing. I just asked, that's all. By the way, here is a small wallet that Tom Hazard dropped out of his pocket as he was getting into the wagon."

"Give it to me," said Faber, eagerly grasping it.

Henry gave it up, readily enough.

He had already been through it, and the two bills and small amount of change which it had contained was now safely tucked away in his own pocket.

As soon as Henry left the room, Faber opened the wallet and deftly examined its contents.

There were a number of unimportant memoranda that did not interest him, but in a small pocket, made to hold postage stamps, Faber found something that not only interested but greatly excited him.

It was a slip of paper on which were scribbled a set of figures.

"I believe this is the combination of the safe. If I am right, I shall not need to follow Hazard to Byfield."

He hastened down to the dining-room, which was deserted.

He turned the key in both doors and then, with the paper in his grasp, he proceeded to test the matter in hand.

It was the combination, and inside of a few moments the big steel door swung open on its hinges.

The interior was well filled with silverware and other articles of considerable value.

Taking the small, flat key from his vest-pocket, Faber found, with a thrill of exultation, that it fitted the inner keyhole.

To open the small, steel door and thrust in his hand was the work of but a moment.

He grasped a pile of papers of various sizes and drew them forth.

Rushing over to one of the windows he eagerly sorted them out.

At that moment the handle of one of the doors was turned sharply by somebody on the other side.

Faber started as though stung by a venomous insect, and half of the papers dropped to the floor.

One of them slid underneath a light table standing close at hand.

The rascally brother stood trembling for a moment after the sound ceased and then pulled himself together.

"Pshaw! What a fool I am to be rattled for nothing," he exclaimed, stooping and picking up the papers, excepting the one that was out of sight.

Then he went on quickly but carefully, looking at each of the documents he had taken from the safe.

The will was not among them.

He rushed back and felt around the inner compartment, but there was nothing left in there.

He hurriedly went over the papers again, but without result.

"Strange!" he muttered. "I distinctly heard my brother say, with almost his last breath, that it was in this place. Could he have removed it and then forgotten the circumstance? It isn't like my brother to do such a thing. Then where can it be?"

He searched through the other parts of the safe without finding the paper.

At last he was satisfied that the will was not in the safe.

"It must be that Tom Hazard has taken it out for some reason. No, he could not get into that compartment without the key, which had been in my possession almost from the moment my brother died. The will must be somewhere else, and I am beaten just when I was sure of success. What shall I do now? What can I do but make the best of an unfortunate situation?"

He locked the inner compartment, after restoring the papers that were of no use to him, and then shut the safe door.

After that he unlocked both doors and retired to the library to brood over his keen disappointment and chagrin.

CHAPTER V.

HENRY PRESCOTT SHOWS THE CLOVEN FOOT.

While he was thus engaged, Henry appeared and told him that Black Bess was ready.

"I have changed my mind," said his father, shortly. "I shan't want her after all."

"May I use her, then, father?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"Do you think you can ride her?"

"Sure I can," replied Henry, confidently.

"Very well, but be careful she does not throw you."

Henry hastened away and was soon galloping down the road.

"I must return that key to the bunch. It is of no further use to me," mused Faber, when he was alone again. "Its absence would be likely to arouse suspicion, especially if Tom looks in the compartment for the will, as he was directed to do in the presence of the lawyer, and it is not found there, as of course it will not be."

He went into the room where his brother had just been laid out by the undertaker from the adjacent village, who had gone to get a suitable coffin for the deceased, and finding the trousers in the same place, undisturbed, he replaced the key on the ring and left the room.

Paul Prescott all this time was in the seclusion of his room.

He felt his loss keenly, for he had been very much attached to his father, particularly since the death of his mother.

He did not feel like showing himself around the house, but left everything to Tom Hazard or his uncle.

During the afternoon he spent an hour with his dead father, and then Tom, after his return from Byfield, persuaded him to go out for a short walk.

Although overwhelmed by the death of his father, Paul did not altogether forget the girl he had saved from the persecution of Captain Grinnidge.

Meeting the housekeeper in the dining-room, he spoke to her about Dolly Curtis.

"I want you to do all you can for her, Mrs. Grey, for I think she is a good girl. You will greatly oblige me by looking after her, for she is an orphan, like myself."

His eyes filled with tears as the thought recalled his own loss, and it took a great effort on his part to choke back a sob that came into his throat.

"Be assured, Paul, that I will do all I can for her," said the housekeeper, kindly. "Since you wish it, she shall have a home here with me. I have already taken a great fancy to her. She seems gentle, affectionate and willing. Perhaps she may yet come to fill the void left in my heart by the death of my own dear child," she added, in a faltering tone. "At any rate, my heart goes out to her, and I shall try to win her confidence and love."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gray," replied Paul.

"She is very grateful to you, and feels very sorry for you in your affliction. She cried a good deal when I told her that your father lay dead in his bed on your arrival home last night. Yes, I am sure that she is a good, true girl, and that you made no mistake in offering her the shelter of the Roost."

"I am sure I did not," replied the boy, feeling tenderly grateful to Dolly for her sympathy in his hour of trouble.

Then he left the house for a little exercise in the crisp afternoon air.

While he was away, Henry got back from his ride.

He had ridden Black Bess pretty hard, and the animal was covered with sweat when he brought her to the stable.

Old John, who looked after the horses, was angry at her appearance.

"What have you been doing to Bess?" he asked, curtly. "I thought it was your father that wanted to ride her, instead of which it seems that it was yourself."

"My father changed his mind when I told him the mare was ready, and he said that I could use her," replied Henry, haughtily.

"Well, it isn't likely you'll use her again in a hurry, for you don't seem to know how to treat a valuable animal."

"I'll use her whenever I choose, if my father says so," replied Henry, sharply.

"You forget, young man, that your father is not master of Prescott's Roost," replied John Barnes, with equal sharpness.

"He will be after the funeral," answered the boy, with a confident nod.

"Don't be too certain of that."

"Why not? Isn't my father George Prescott's brother?"

"Who has a better right here than he? Besides, he'll be Paul's guardian, and that will give him charge of this place, anyhow."

"All right, young man, have it your way," replied John, who didn't care to carry on an ill-timed and useless argument, leading Bess into the stable.

"Yah!" snarled Henry, looking after him. "I don't like you for a cent. Perhaps you won't be here forever."

Then, feeling thirsty, he started toward a spring in a grove nearby to get a drink.

All the water used in the house was got at this spring, where it had flowed out of the rocks from time out of mind.

It was surrounded by a rustic stone wall under a wide roof, supported by four stout posts, the whole encompassed by evergreen trees.

When Henry walked into the grove he found Dolly Curtis there with a pail.

"Hello! you here?" he grinned, in a self-complaisant way. "Gimme a drink, will you?"

His manner and tone were not calculated to make a favorable impression on the young girl, who mentally decided that she did not like him.

Without a word, she filled a tin dipper and handed it to him.

He accepted it with out any thanks, and drank the contents.

"So you're the girl we picked up last night along the road, eh? Who was you running away from? Your old man?"

Dolly shook her head, and, raising her filled pail, started to leave the grove.

"Hold on. Don't be in a hurry," said Henry, detaining her. "I want to talk to you. What did you say your name was? Dolly something."

"You'll have to excuse me; I'm in a hurry," she replied, trying to pass him.

"Oh, come off! There isn't any need for you to be in a rush, especially when it's me who's talking to you. I suppose you don't know who I am? Well, my name is Henry Prescott. It's my uncle who has just passed in his checks. My father will be the boss of this property after the funeral—in fact, he's the whole thing now, for that matter. If you want to stay at this place you've got to be good to me, see?"

"You!" flashed Dolly, in surprise. "Mrs. Gray, the housekeeper, told me that Paul Prescott, the boy who so bravely saved me last night, is the master of this place. It was his father who died."

"That's all right. He'll own it after a few years; but while he's under age my father is going to run the Roost. My father will be his guardian, and will live here while he's in charge. And, of course, I'll live here, too. In fact, I'll have a good deal more to say than my cousin will. If I said you'd have to go, my father would back me up, and what could my cousin do? Nothing. You'd have to take a sneak. Now if you treat me right you can stay as long as you want to."

"Treat you right!"

"Yes. Do whatever I tell you to do. Now, to begin with, I want you to give me a kiss."

"Never!" cried Dolly, indignantly, backing away from him.

"You'd better, if you know when you're well off," said Henry, darkly. "Remember what I just told you. If you don't keep in with me your name here will be mud."

"You haven't any right to talk to me that way," flashed Dolly, with some spirit. "I shall ask the housekeeper whether you have anything to say or not."

"Ask her," sneered Henry. "If she doesn't mind her P's and Q's she'll get the bounce, too. I'll bet my governor will have a new set of servants, anyway, and I hope he will, for the old ones imagine they own the place."

"I don't think you talk very nice, and your uncle dead in the house," said Dolly, a bit resentfully.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it is. You don't seem to be a bit sorry for your cousin. He went out for a walk a little while ago. You ought to have gone with him to cheer him up."

"Oh, I ain't stuck on him. He isn't my style."

"I should say he isn't. He's brave, and handsome, and generous, while you—you're mean and disagreeable."

"Oh, I'm mean and disagreeable, am I?" he snarled.

"Yes, you are, so there!"

"Are you going to give me a kiss?"

"No! I wouldn't kiss you for a million dollars."

"Then I'll make you."

He seized her by the wrist and gave it a sudden turn that brought a scream of pain to her lips.

"Now will you kiss me?"

"No!" she flashed.

He gave her wrist another twist.

Her second scream brought help in the person of Paul Prescott.

CHAPTER VI.

HENRY'S IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

"What are you doing to Miss Curtis, Henry?" asked Paul, sternly. "Let go of her wrist."

"What are you chipping in here for where you're not wanted?" snorted his cousin.

"Let go her wrist, do you hear?"

There was that in Paul's eye which warned Henry to take heed, and being a coward at heart he dropped Dolly's arm and, with a dark, revengeful look at his cousin, he hastily left the grove.

"I hope he didn't hurt you, Miss Dolly," said Paul, turning to the girl, whose flushed face and tearful eye showed that she had been under a strain.

"I don't know," she replied, hesitatingly, looking gratefully at him.

He took up her little hand and saw that she winced.

"He did hurt you, then? Allow me to apologize for him."

"No, you shan't apologize for him—he isn't worth it. I don't like him, and I never will, even if he is your cousin. He isn't at all like you. You've treated me so generously, while he—he insulted me."

"I am sorry," replied Paul. "He shan't do it again. I won't stand for it."

"He told me that if I didn't do what he wanted me to he'd have me sent away."

"He told you that?"

"Yes. He said that his father was in charge of this place now, and that you wouldn't have anything to say for some years. He told me that he and his father were going to live here."

"I don't believe my father's will makes his father my guardian. I have understood differently. Henry, I think, will find himself mistaken. So he threatened you, did he? Don't worry, Miss Dolly. I told you I'd stand by you, and I will."

"You are very good to me. And, oh, Mr. Paul, I'm so sorry for you in your trouble. I wish—I wish I could do something to make you feel less unhappy, indeed, indeed I do."

She spoke earnestly, and Paul, looking into her face, saw that a great sympathy for him overflowed her eyes.

He was much affected by this exhibition of feeling on her part.

He recognized in her a warm and true friend in that dark hour of his life.

In fact, he felt so grateful for her girlish sympathy that hardly realizing what he did he put his arm around her, drew her toward him and kissed her.

"Oh, Mr. Paul!" she exclaimed, starting back in great confusion, while her face grew scarlet.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Dolly," he said, hastily, holding her hand, which she did not attempt to withdraw from his grasp. "I couldn't help it. Forgive me."

"I—I am not angry with you," she answered, softly, with downcast eyes.

"Then I am glad. I kissed you because I saw the sympathy your face expressed for me. At the moment you seemed just like a dear sister who was trying to comfort me when I most need it. I thank you for that sympathy, and, believe me, if you will let me, I will be your one true friend for life. May I?"

"I am not worthy to——"

"Not worthy? Why, you're the best and truest girl I have ever met. If you are an orphan, so am I now. I have no blood relative in the world but Henry and his father, and I do not trust either. But I can trust you, Dolly. Be a sister to me. Let me be a brother to you. Let me always protect you, and let me always feel that in you I have some one to care for. Shall this be as I wish?"

"Do you really wish it?" she asked, shyly.

"I do. Is it yes?"

"Yes—Paul."

In the meantime, Henry entered the house in a very bad humor.

He was furious at his cousin, and yearned for a chance to get square with him.

His ride had made him hungry and he began to think it was time that dinner ought to be nearly ready.

When he looked into the dining-room and saw that the table wasn't even set he got a bigger grouch on than ever.

He proceeded to the kitchen and put up a howl to the cook.

As the cook was boss of her own department, and not accustomed to being dictated to, she sat down on Henry in a way that did not improve his temper.

He returned to the dining-room, with a scowl on his face as dark as a thunder-gust.

"Just wait till father takes charge of this place and I'll bet I'll have that cook bounced right off the reel. The idea of her talking to me as if I was just nobody at all," he growled.

He was standing by one of the windows, gazing moodily out on the lawn, and feeling that he must vent his ill-humor on something, he gave the light table close by a vicious kick.

It went over on its side.

"What did you want to fall over for and give me the trouble of picking you up?" he snarled. "I've a great mind to leave you lie there."

At that moment his sharp eyes noticed an oblong document lying on the polished floor where the table had stood.

Curiosity induced him to pick it up and examine it.

The word "Will" was printed in large, plain type on the back.

"What's this?" he said, in some surprise, gazing at the word.

He looked at it closer.

What he saw made all his hungry sensations vanish in a moment.

"Will of George Prescott. Dated, April 16. Why, can this be my uncle's will? What is it doing here?"

He started to open it, then reconsidered the matter, put it into his pocket and hastened up to his own room, where he locked himself in.

Taking the will from his pocket he read it over from the beginning to the end.

"Whew! This leaves everything to Paul, except \$1,000 to my father, and a paltry \$500 to me. That beast of a Tom Hazard is appointed his guardian, and is also made an associate administrator of the estate, with the lawyer who drew this up. Why, father is left out in the cold altogether. That's a nice way for my uncle to treat us, I must say. The governor won't have a thing to say about anything, and, of course, he and I will be dumped out of this soft snap we have calculated on. Gee! I must run and put him wise to the whole thing."

Henry got up and started for the door.

Suddenly he stopped and a shrewd grin came over his face.

"No, I won't. I'll just hold on to this will myself. If the old thing isn't found when it's wanted the provisions won't go. Then my father will have something to say, I

guess. He's entitled to a good rake-off, and I'll bet he'll get it. But where do I come in? I won't get the \$500 in that case. I know what I'll do. I'll just hold this over the governor's head. If he refuses to cough up when I want money I'll threaten to send the will to Lawyer Harrison, and put myself in line for the \$500. He'll be glad to knuckle down to me, bet your life. Nothing like being able to make one's old man toe the mark when you want him to."

Henry grinned in a satisfied way, and returned the will to his pocket.

"I tell you, it's a fine thing to be born smart. Paul isn't in it with me, even a little bit. I'll feather my nest with this will. I'll bet I'll get several times \$500 out of the governor before I'm through with him. I wish they'd put dinner on the table, for I'm feeling mighty hungry. When my father takes charge of these diggings the cook will do as I tell her to or there'll be something doing."

Evidently, Henry Prescott had inherited some of his father's worst traits.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSING WILL.

Immediately after the funeral of George Prescott, which was largely attended by the best people of West Newbury, Lawyer Harrison, who had arrived in response to Tom Hazard's telegram, notified Faber Prescott that his old client's will would be read in the library after dinner.

The calm assurance of his tone gave Faber a fit, for he believed that the legal gentleman had the will in his possession.

However, he put the best face on the matter that he could.

In accordance with Mr. Harrison's directions, Tom Hazard notified all the household to appear in the library at eight o'clock that evening.

In due time dinner was announced and eaten by Faber, who sat at the head of the table, as a matter of courtesy, Lawyer Harrison, Paul, Henry and Tom Hazard.

At the conclusion of the meal the first four adjourned to the library.

In the course of half an hour Tom appeared at the door of that room and beckoned to the lawyer.

That gentleman immediately joined him.

"I am now ready to open the safe, in your presense, as directed by Mr. Prescott. The will is in the inner compartment, to which I have the key," said Tom.

"I am ready to go with you," said the lawyer, and accordingly they went at once to the dining-room.

Tom opened the safe, unlocked the inner compartment, took out the papers therein and handed them to the lawyer.

Mr. Harrison looked them over, slowly, one by one, but, of course, did not find the will he had drawn up about six months before.

"The will is not among these. Look again," he said.

Tom put his hand in and then declared there was no other paper in there.

The lawyer took it on himself to look in order to make sure, and saw that the inner compartment was empty.

"You say that Mr. Prescott told you distinctly that the will was there?" said Mr. Harrison, knitting his brows.

"He did. I couldn't have been mistaken, for he particularly told me to take possession of the key and keep it till you asked for the will."

"Which you did, I suppose?" asked the lawyer, looking at the old employe.

"Yes, sir, though not immediately, because I was so overcome by Mr. Prescott's death that I forgot about the matter until the next night."

"Indeed. Where was the key in the meantime?"

"In the pocket of a pair of trousers last worn by Mr. Prescott."

"Hum! And these trousers were lying around some place in his bedroom, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Folded, on a chair."

"Where anybody—his brother, for instance—could get at them?"

Tom gave a start.

"Do you think——" he began, then he stopped. "Had he taken the key he could not have used it."

"Why not?" asked Mr. Harrison, sharply.

"Because I am the only one now who holds the combination of the safe lock."

"Sure of that, are you?"

"Yes, sir."

"When you finally looked for the key you found it all right, did you?"

"I did."

"Let us go through the rest of the safe."

This they did, but without result.

"It is evident that the will is not here," said the lawyer, finally.

"Not here!" almost gasped Tom, looking stunned by that announcement.

"It is not here," repeated Mr. Harrison, returning the papers to the inner compartment. "Shut up the safe."

Tom mechanically did so.

"I'm afraid that Mr. Prescott must have removed that will, to read it over perhaps, and then forgot to return it."

"But his directions were most positive," said Tom, nervously.

"No doubt he thought he had returned it to the safe, instead of which, he may have left it in a drawer of his desk."

Tom made no reply.

"It is of the utmost importance that that will be found," said the lawyer. Not that its loss would prevent young Paul from inheriting the bulk of the property, but because its absence would greatly benefit Faber Prescott, who, I have reason to know, is deserving of little consideration at his dead brother's hands. If there be no will for probate, the public administrator will have to step in and take charge. He would be entitled to a very considerable fee in this case. Then the court will have to appoint a guardian

for Paul, and I doubt not Mr. Faber Prescott would put forward his claim to be considered as such in his position of nearest of kin. That would enable him to take up his residence here, and there are pickings for a man of his character which would amply compensate him. He would also be entitled to a much larger share of the estate than Mr. Prescott intended him to have when the final distribution was made. Altogether, our dead friend's intentions would be sadly interfered with. You would lose the legacy left you in the will, as would the servants, and even young Henry would be out his \$500 if his father didn't make it up to him. As for the heir-at-law it would make a difference of many thousands to him."

"If Mr. Prescott left the will in his desk his brother has had every chance to discover it since my employer was taken ill."

"Exactly. And Faber Prescott is not a man to be trusted."

They returned to the library, where everybody was gathered by this time, and Mr. Harrison was obliged to announce that the will had not been found in the place where it was supposed to be.

At those words, Faber brightened up considerably, but he still wondered where the will could be.

Henry smothered a triumphant grin in his hand and then looked down at the carpet.

Paul looked surprised and a bit uneasy at the lawyer's declaration.

Mr. Harrison said that he would look through the late Mr. Prescott's desk, which he proceeded to do, but without making any discovery.

Other places were searched unsuccessfully, and as the hunt continued to prove fruitless, Faber began to take courage and hope.

In the end the lawyer was compelled to dismiss the servants with the statement that a further and, if possible, more thorough search would be made next day.

Next day's hunt developed nothing, and the lawyer was at his wit's end.

Finally the matter was taken to court.

Mr. Harrison, appearing in behalf of Tom Hazard, who made application to be appointed guardian of Paul Prescott, submitted an affidavit, signed by himself, which set forth that he had, at his late client's request, drawn up a will, corresponding in all important particulars to the rough draft of same which he produced as evidence, and that Mr. George Prescott and the two witnesses, whose affidavits were attached, had signed the said will, now missing, in his presence.

The said will was then carried away by the testator, who thereafter held it in his custody.

Hazard's application was opposed by Faber Prescott, who, in default of any legal will, urged his own claims for the guardianship on the ground that he was the nearest relative of the heir-at-law, and consequently the one most likely to do the right thing by the boy.

Mr. Harrison took issue against Faber on the ground

that it was not the dead man's desire that his brother should become guardian of his son, for good and sufficient reasons—reasons which he was prepared to show, by witnesses, rendered the said brother unsuitable for so important a trust.

The said objections were then brought forward, and as they were a grave reflection on Mr. Faber Prescott's general character, a bitter legal squabble ensued between the opposing lawyers.

The judge took the papers and reserved his decision.

In the end he decided the case in favor of Tom Hazard, and Faber Prescott at once appealed to a high court.

Pending the ultimate outcome, Mr. Harrison was temporarily appointed Paul's guardian, with full powers to act in that capacity.

Faber and his son Henry then left the Roost, and the servants were all delighted to see them go.

Paul, in the meantime, had returned to the Gloucester Academy and resumed his studies, after taking an affectionate leave of Dolly Curtis, whom he left under the housekeeper's motherly wing.

Although Faber Prescott had failed to win his trump trick, he had more trumps up his sleeve, and was, therefore, a dangerous factor in the game.

CHAPTER VIII.

STARTLING NEWS FROM THE ROOST.

The Gloucester Academy, presided over by Dr. John Watson, was situated on high ground overlooking Gloucester Harbor.

About a hundred pupils, from fourteen to eighteen years of age, attended the school, and, as a whole, they were a jolly lot of boys.

Paul Prescott was first favorite, not only with his companions but with the teachers as well.

He was a leader in all the sports, and held that position against all comers by sheer grit and superior performance.

He expected to graduate on the following June and then enter Harvard College.

It was now about two months after his father's death, or within a couple of weeks of the Christmas holidays.

The class-rooms were emptied for the day, the boys were amusing themselves about the campus, or elsewhere, and it was growing dark fast.

Paul Prescott, accompanied by one of his chums, called Andy Owens, was sitting on a single-rail fence, if it could be called a fence, close to the academy office, waiting for the factotem, who had gone to town for the evening mail, to return.

He was looking for his bi-weekly letter from Dolly Curtis.

He figured that he ought to have got it the day before, and when it didn't turn up that morning he was greatly disappointed.

However, it was bound to come by the evening's mail, and he was curbing his impatience as best he could.

He had only told two of his special friends about his

thrilling introduction to the girl, but in spite of their promises to be mum on the subject the news of his adventure on the night his father died leaked out, and it wasn't long before the whole school knew about it, and for many days afterwards the boys "joshed" him about the pretty runaway he had rescued from the fangs of a human wolf.

He took care, however, that none of his companions got on to the fact that she was corresponding with him twice a week.

Paul and Andy were talking football, and figuring up the prospects of the academy eleven beating the Manchester High School team on the coming Saturday, when an ugly-looking man, with the rolling gait of a sailor, approached the spot.

"Beggin' yer pardon, my hearties, but can yer tell me where I can find a lad of this here school named Paul Prescott?"

"You've found him already. My name is Paul Prescott," replied Paul, regarding the man with some curiosity and not a little distrust.

"And yer live at Prescott Roost when yer at home?" said the man, with a leer, that added to his villainous aspect.

"Yes. What do you want with me?"

"I was told to give yer this letter," he said, eyeing Paul, cunningly, as he took an envelope, which had suffered from contact with his dirty hand, from his pocket and tendered it to the boy.

"Who is this from?" asked Paul, looking at the superscription, which was scrawled in lead pencil and not over intelligible.

"Dunno," replied the sailor, for such he evidently was. "I never seen the gent afore."

"You say a gentleman gave you this to hand to me?" said Paul, in some surprise. "I don't know any gentleman in Glo'ster that's likely to send me a note."

"Dunno nothin' about that, my hearty. I'm only 'beyin' orders, and 'arnin' half a dollar," replied the man. "Yer want to read it, as I was told to bring back an answer."

It was too dark to read the note out there, so Paul told him to wait and went into the office of the school, where there were electric lights.

Tearing the envelope open, he pulled out an enclosure, which read as follows:

"Paul Prescott—I know where the missing will of your late father can be found. If you want information on the subject you must manage to come to the Old Watch Tower, on Gull Point, to-night at eight o'clock. Let bearer know if I can expect you.

"(Signed)

INCOGNITO."

To say that Paul was astonished at the contents of the note would be to put it quite mildly.

Who could this person be who claimed to know the whereabouts of his father's will?

Why had he appointed a night meeting at such a lonesome spot as the old Revolutionary watch tower on Gull

Point, when a daylight meeting, it seemed to Paul, could be more easily arranged, at least so far as he himself was concerned?

It was strictly against the regulations of the academy for a scholar to leave the school after dark, on any pretext whatever, without special permission.

If he agreed to keep this appointment, and he had more than half a mind to do it, for he was naturally extremely anxious to get a clew to the missing will, would Dr. Watson, under the circumstances, give him the necessary permission?

"I guess he'll strain a point when I have explained matters to him," thought Paul. "Yes, I'll go to the Old Watch Tower at eight o'clock, if it's possible for me to get there."

Having come to that determination, he gave the disreputable-looking sailor an answer to that effect, and he rolled away, like a Dutch fishing smack in a cross sea.

"That was a strange kind of a messenger to bring you a letter," remarked Andy, after the man had gone.

"Yes. And the letter was just as strange as the bearer," replied Paul.

"What was it about?" asked Andy, curiously.

"I told you that my father's will was missing," answered Paul.

"Yes, and that the question as to who your guardian should be brought into court. What has that to do with this letter?"

"The letter is from a man who claims to know where the will is."

"You don't say!"

"He wants me to meet him to-night at eight o'clock at the Old Watch Tower on the Point, to drive a bargain for it."

"He does?"

"He didn't say in so many words that he wanted to be paid for his information, but, of course, that is what he is trying to get at. If he has the will in his possession, or knows where to put his hands on it, he will want to be paid, and it isn't impossible but he may ask a stiff price."

"Then, he must be a rascal."

"It's the way of the world, Andy, to take advantage of a good thing."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to ask the Doctor to let me keep the appointment."

"What, alone?"

"Yes."

"You'd better let me go with you. You'll want a witness."

"The party might object to your presence."

"Then I can stay outside the tower."

"Well, I will be glad to have you come. I'll ask the Doctor to let you accompany me."

"That's right. Now, I'd suggest that we go there half an hour before the time appointed and hide."

"What for?"

"So as to see what kind of man this person is who is

anxious to do business with you under cover. You can't be too careful. It might be some kind of put-up job, for all you know. I didn't like the looks of that sailor. If more than one man comes to the tower we needn't show ourselves, and perhaps we might, in that case, get on to their game."

"That's a god idea of yours, Andy, and we'll follow it out. I didn't think of any treachery in connection with the note; but, as you say, it is better to be on the safe side."

"Bet your life it is."

At that moment the man with the mail-bag appeared, entered the office, and Paul was about to follow him in when the supper-bell rang.

That was an imperative summons for the boys to take their places in the line that was formed three times daily outside of the refectory.

"Too bad," ejaculated Paul, in a disappointed tone, "I'll have to wait for the regular distribution of the letters now."

"What's the odds?" replied Andy. "If there's a letter for you, you'll get it all right."

The hundred odd boys were marched into the dining-hall and took their places at the different tables that accommodated twenty-six lads each, two of which officiated as "carvers" at either end of each table.

Paul occupied one of these posts, which carried with it certain privileges as compensation for the duties of the position.

One of the professors occupied a low rostrum near the general entrance, and while the boys were eating, the letters were delivered to him for distribution, as the scholars filed out.

A letter was handed to Paul as he passed out of the room, and he hastened to the library and reading-room to peruse it.

As soon as he looked at the superscription he was greatly disappointed to find that it was in the housekeeper's handwriting and not in Dolly's.

He immediately jumped to the conclusion that the girl must be sick, and he tore the envelope open, with a good deal of anxiety.

He was not prepared, however, for the startling news that he read.

It was to the effect that Captain Grinnidge had appeared at the Roost a few days previously and demanded that Dolly should leave her new home and go with him.

The girl, naturally, refused, and had been sustained by Tom Hazard, who was in charge of the property under Lawyer Harrison.

Two days later Dolly was missing, and it was Mrs. Gray's opinion that the captain had in some way managed to abduct her.

Hazard had put the matter in the hands of a Newburyport detective, who had gone to Gloucester to watch for the Lively Polly, on board of which it was believed the girl was held a prisoner.

That was all, but the news was sufficiently disquieting to Paul, who was alarmed for Dolly's safety.

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT.

At half-past seven that evening, Paul and Andy approached the Old Watch Tower, near the extreme end of Gull Point, a small promontory projecting into Gloucester Bay.

It was a lonesome and bleak spot, particularly at that season of the year.

The tower itself was in a very fair state of preservation, considering its age, and was reckoned one of the sights of the neighborhood.

The external surface of the stone was completely covered by moss and ivy during spring, summer and fall; but at the present time this green ornamentation was dried up and brown, and the gray stone was visible everywhere.

The two boys kept their eyes about them as they entered the ancient building, for fear of falling into some trap prepared for them.

Nothing of the kind happened, however.

At the moment the place seemed to be entirely deserted.

"We're lucky," said Andy. "We've got here first. Now let's take a look around and see where we can hide until we're ready to show ourselves."

The ground floor was pretty bare, though it was as dark as the ace of spades, so the boys decided to ascend to the second story.

"We'll stand by one of these narrow windows," said Paul, "and then we'll be able to see who comes to this place."

"That will be fine," replied Andy. "This window over here looks out on the bay," he added, walking over to it and glancing out.

The night was clear as well as cold, so that it was easy to make an observation from the second story of the watch tower.

Twenty minutes passed slowly away and Paul saw no sign of any one coming toward the tower.

"It's pretty near time for that man to show up, don't you think so, Andy?" he said.

"It is, if he expects to be on time. Seems as if we've been here nearly an hour."

"We haven't been here half that time," replied Paul, striking a match and looking at his watch.

"Waiting is tiresome work," said Andy, strolling across to the other window. "Hello!" he exclaimed, after glancing out on the water. "There's a schooner coming to anchor close in to this point."

"A schooner!" cried Paul, rushing over to the other window. "So there is. A good-sized one, carrying a fore-topsail. A coaster, evidently. I wonder why she's mooring off this place? I guess she's come down from Glo'ster."

The boys watched her with some interest.

Her sails were lowered, but not secured, and instead of dropping her anchor a small hawser was carried ashore in a boat and made fast to a big rock on the shore.

It was clear that her presence in that neighborhood was only intended to be temporary.

There were five men, one of whom was bossing operations, aboard of her, while a sixth man was attending to the shore end of the cable.

This chap, having finished his business, returned to the vessel, after which silence and inaction succeeded.

Four of the men lighted their pipes and sprawled off forward, while the other two remained seated together on the rise of the trunk cabin.

"Maybe she's waiting for high tide to pass the bar below," said Paul.

"She's a good distance up for that, I should think," replied Andy. "The fishing vessels all go down and anchor close to the bar when the tide is at ebb."

"Well, it's none of our business," answered Paul, starting back for the other window. "Come here, Andy," he cried, a moment later. "There's a man and a boy coming this way."

Andy ran over and looked out.

"That's right. If he's only got a boy with him we needn't be afraid of meeting him."

"Well, we won't be in a hurry about it," replied Paul.

When the man, who was heavily bearded and wore a soft, slouched hat, and his companion drew near the entrance, the boy hung back and the man advanced.

He entered the ground floor of the building and called out, in a gruff voice:

"Paul Prescott, are you here?"

No answer being returned to his hail he spoke to his companion, in a somewhat different tone, which sounded familiar to Paul.

"He hasn't come yet, Henry."

"Is that so, father?" replied the boy, coming forward.

"My uncle and cousin," gasped Paul, in utter astonishment. "What does this mean?"

"Your uncle and cousin?" ejaculated Andy, in surprise.

"Yes. And my uncle is disguised by a heavy beard."

"Then he's up to some crooked work, depend on it."

Father and son both entered the ground floor of the old ruin, and Paul and Andy crept to the opening above the stairs and craned their necks to hear what was said below.

"Go outside and see if the schooner has arrived," said Faber Prescott. "If she has, give the signal for Grinnidge to come ashore with his mate."

"Grinnidge!" again gasped Paul. "Why, that vessel must be the Lively Polly. Maybe Dolly Curtis is at this moment a prisoner aboard of her."

"It's a good thing that we are in the background," whispered Andy. "There is something on the cards against you, old chap. Perhaps we'll be able to find out what it is. The will business seems to be a fake—a bait to draw you here."

"It looks like it," Paul whispered back.

Henry Prescott left the room below to carry out his father's instructions, and while he was away Faber lighted a cigar and began to smoke.

In a few moments Henry returned.

"The schooner is there and the men are coming ashore," he said.

"Now, hand me the will and go outside and watch for your cousin."

"I'm to have \$1,000, remember," replied Henry, as he produced the document. "If you go back on me, father, I'll blow on you, as sure as I stand here."

"Don't talk like a fool," answered Faber, impatiently. "You shall have the thousand, of course."

"All right. There you are."

"Now let me know the moment you see Paul coming."

"Are you sure he'll come?"

"He said he would, and I know he's a boy of his word."

Faber laid the will on one of the steps near his elbow and waited.

Presently Captain Grinnidge and the man who delivered the note to Paul appeared at the doorway.

Faber got up and went toward them, and the three engaged in a low conversation—too low for the boys to catch the drift of it.

It was then that a daring thing occurred to Paul's mind.

He had seen his rascally uncle lay the document, purporting to be his father's will, on the third step of the stairs.

Although he couldn't see it in the darkness he was certain it was there.

He determined, at any hazard, to creep down and gain possession of it.

Although the three men stood right in the doorway, and were plainly visible, he believed that he would not be noticed in the intense gloom surrounding the stairs.

He whispered his purpose to Andy.

"Gee!" chuckled his companion. "That will be turning the trick on him in great shape. Go slow and make a sure thing of it."

Accordingly, Paul crept cautiously down the stairs until he got to a point near the third step.

He now saw the document distinctly, and, reaching out, grasped it.

Then he made his way back to the floor above, without attracting attention.

"Got it?" whispered Andy.

"Yes," replied Paul.

He went over to a corner, struck a match and, shading the light under his overcoat, looked at the paper.

It needed but a glance to assure him that he had his father's will in his possession.

He felt like executing an Indian war dance, so great was his satisfaction.

It slipped from his hand as he was about to put it into his pocket, and he knelt down to feel for it.

His fingers struck it and pushed it into a crack in the stone flooring.

Not finding it easily, he struck another match to look around.

It wasn't in sight, but the crack was.

Looking down into it he saw the precious paper where he

couldn't reach it without a couple of stiff pieces of wire or metal.

"How provoking!" he muttered, in a tone of vexation.

He was angry and disgusted with himself for having been so careless, and yet he soon had reason for being very glad that the will had got away from him.

He got out his knife and tried to reach the paper with the long blade and dig it out.

While thus engaged, Faber happened to remember that he had left the will on the stairs, and returned for it.

Not finding it, he struck a match and looked for it.

Andy observed what he was about, and crept over to his chum to tell him.

Then he saw what Paul was about.

"Let it alone for the present," he said. "It's safe enough. We can come over here to-morrow with some wire and get it out. Your uncle is looking for it now. I'll bet he's astonished at its disappearance."

At that moment there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

"Gee!" cried Andy, in a flutter, "I believe he's coming up here now. Maybe he suspects something. Where can we hide?"

There was no place where they could conceal themselves if a light was thrown on the scene.

"Come on, Grinnidge," they heard Mr. Prescott say. "I believe that boy came here ahead of time, got suspicious and is hiding upstairs. If he's here we'll have him cornered. I guess he's smarter than I had any idea of, and I can't waste any time on him now."

Faber sprang up the stairs, followed by the captain and his mate.

Striking a match, Mr. Prescott looked around.

In the glare of the flame Paul and Andy were discovered crouching against one of the walls.

There was no escape for them now, and they knew it.

CHAPTER X.

CARRIED OFF.

"Why, there's two of them," exclaimed Captain Grinnidge.

"So you are there, Paul Prescott?" said Faber, maliciously.

"Yes, I am here, Uncle Faber," replied Paul, coolly.

"So you recognize me, do you?" sneered his rascally relative, who seemed to have given up the idea of any further deception.

"I know you, all right," answered the boy, calmly.

The expiring match dropped from Faber's hand, and then the conversation went on in the dark.

"You were here when I arrived and called out to you below."

"I was."

"Why didn't you show yourself, then?"

"I had my reasons."

"Did you suspect my intentions?"

"I did, the moment I recognized you."

"How could you identify me in this beard and in the darkness?"

"I knew you the moment you spoke to Henry, who came with you."

"You were looking through that window and saw us approach, I suppose?"

"Yes; though I did not recognize either of you at the time. It's too dark for that."

"Did you suspect me as the writer of that note proposing this interview?"

"I did not."

"Did you entertain any suspicions concerning the alleged object of the note?"

"I thought the hour and the place rather singular, but it was not out of keeping with the peculiar purpose of the writer."

"You mean you judged that a man making such a proposal would wish to keep under cover. Is that it?"

"That's about it."

"So you decided to keep the appointment, but bring a schoolmate for greater security."

"Yes."

"Your object was to get possession of your father's missing will?"

"It was."

"And you have succeeded, though in a different way from what you figured on," said his uncle, in a compressed tone.

"In what way have I succeeded?" replied Paul, pretending surprise.

"In what way?" roared Faber, his anger bursting out at last. "You know in what way. I laid the document on the stairs leading up here, not suspecting that you, of all others, were watching me. When I went to the door you sneaked down and secured it. But," he added, striking another match, "you'll oblige me by returning it to me."

"If I had the will I should make a strong fight against giving it up, but as I haven't it, why, you'll have to look for it elsewhere."

"That bluff doesn't go with me. Search him, Grinnidge."

Paul made no resistance while the captain of the *Lively Polly*, who was aching for the chance to get at him, went through his clothes.

The skipper was unnecessarily rough, but he did not find anything that even remotely looked like the will.

"He has probably given it to his companion. Search him," said Faber.

Andy was searched, without result.

Paul's uncle then examined the floor of the room, and the walls, but saw no sign of the will.

He was nonplussed.

"What did you do with it?" he demanded of his nephew.

"I haven't done anything with it," replied Paul.

"I say you have. You have hidden it some place."

"P'haps he throwed it out of one of the windows," suggested Grinnidge.

This idea did not seem unreasonable to Faber.

"If he did that we'll find it outside. Now, secure that precious nephew of mine and carry out your instructions with respect to him. You'll have to take the other boy, too, to head off discovery."

Grinnidge and his mate drew pieces of rope from their pockets, and throwing themselves on the two boys, soon bound their hands tightly behind them.

They seemed to get a good deal of pleasure out of the operation.

"I protest against this outrage, Uncle Faber," said Paul, indignantly. "You ought to be ashamed to permit such a thing to be done to me."

Mr. Prescott laughed, in a disagreeable way.

"You'll be lucky if you're never up against worse than that. Captain Grinnidge has a bone to pick with you, and is going to take you aboard his schooner to pick it. As it would be a pity to part you and your friend, he'll have to accompany you."

Thereupon Paul and Andy were marched downstairs, out of the watch tower, and thence to the water's edge, where they were obliged to get into the waiting boat.

The mate got out the oars and rowed to the schooner, up the side of which the boys were forced to climb.

They were then taken forward and made to step down into a small section of the hold called the fore-peak.

The cover of the hatch or scuttle was clapped on and they were left in the darkness.

"Gee! We seem to be up against it, Paul," said Andy. "I wonder what they're going to do with us?"

"I give it up," replied his chum. "Captain Grinnidge won't dare do much to us unless he's rash enough to face a heavy penalty. He's got nothing against you, but he's dead sore on me for getting Miss Curtis away from him that night. The letter I received this evening from the house-keeper at the Roost told me that the girl is missing, and it is believed that Grinnidge succeeded in abducting her. It's my idea that she's somewhere aboard this schooner at the present moment. If I—hello! I believe they're getting the schooner underway."

"They are, for a fact," replied Andy, in some excitement. "We'll never get back to the academy to-night, at this rate."

"It doesn't look like it, I'm afraid. 'I'd like to know where they intend to take us. As Grinnidge is carrying us off against our wills he'll have to answer for our abduction. As for my uncle, Mr. Harrison will make things hot for him when I lay the case before him.'"

"It was a lucky thing, after all, that you dropped the will into that crack in the floor of the watch tower," said Andy. "Otherwise, your uncle would have got it back when you were searched."

"That's right; but when Mr. Prescott fails to find it outside of the building, he may make a more thorough search of the second floor in daylight. In that case he is liable to notice the crack in the floor, and if he examines it with any care at all he is sure to see the document down in it."

"I don't see that you can help that. There is still the

chance that he will not discover the paper. In any case you can swear that your uncle has had possession of the document, and that when you succeeded in getting it away from him he tried to recover it from you, which, as you had the best right to it, ought to show him up in a bad light. If you find the will gone from the crack in the flooring when you go to the tower after it, it will be good evidence that your uncle discovered its hiding-place, and either has it in his possession or has destroyed it. He can be made to answer some ticklish questions in court, I should think, and I'd hate to be in his shoes when he's up against it. Altogether, I think his chance of making anything out of this scheme is a poor one."

Paul thought Andy's argument good, and was willing to believe that his uncle had played his last card and lost.

Faber Prescott had, however, played a card which he believed was going to win—he had arranged with Captain Grinnidge to effect the permanent disappearance of Paul Prescott from the civilized world.

In other words, Paul was to be carried to sea and abandoned on some island that was rarely if ever visited by a vessel.

He would then be practically dead to the world without having actually been murdered.

Andy Owens, having accompanied Paul to the watch tower, was of necessity included in the same programme, in order to insure the success of the scheme.

The two boys, however, were ignorant of the fate that was in store for them, and believed that it was only a question of a short time before they would get back to the school.

And while they talked the matter over in the gloom of the forepeak, the Lively Polly slipped down the bay to the bar, and as the tide was sufficiently high, passed over it and headed down Massachusetts Bay.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE FOREPEAK OF THE LIVELY POLLY.

Faber Prescott had known Captain Joel Grinnidge many years, and neither knew anything particularly good of the other.

Barring the difference that education and social standing conferred on one of the men, they were to all intents and purposes birds of a feather.

They were both out for the mighty dollar, and were willing to take chances in the accumulation thereof.

When Faber Prescott was beaten out of the chance of securing the guardianship of his nephew, his tricky soul devised this plan of getting the boy out of the way for good.

The death or complete vanishment of the heir-at-law would place him in direct line with the ultimate acquirement of the entire estate as surviving next of kin.

This, in his case, was worth taking desperate chances to win.

As soon as the idea suggested itself to him he sought out Captain Grinnidge and proposed that he assist him in carrying out the project, engaging to pay the skipper a large

sum of money as soon as he came into possession of the property, which he persuaded the captain to believe would be soon.

Captain Grinnidge was not at first inclined to embark in such a hazardous speculation.

When, however, he learned that Paul Prescott was the boy to whom he owed such a big grudge, he reconsidered the matter, and the two rascals came to an agreement.

It was arranged that Captain Grinnidge should secure a cargo in Boston for Rio de Janeiro in order to cover the expenses of the trip to the South Pacific, where it was proposed to carry Paul, and in addition to that, Faber raised a sum sufficient to ensure a total profit for the captain in case by any change a cog slipped and the plot failed.

Before turning the trick on Paul, the skipper planned to recapture Dolly Curtis for the benefit of his wife, who was not, of course, going with him to sea.

They gave up their house in Gloucester, and, taking their furniture aboard of the schooner, sailed for the nearest point on the Merrimac River to the Prescott property.

Then the skipper visited the Roost and demanded that the girl return to his wife's service.

Finding that he could not secure Dolly by fair means, he resorted to underhand tactics, and, luck playing into his hands, he got away with the girl without being caught at it.

Mrs. Grinnidge, Dolly and the furniture were then transferred to a sloop, to be carried up the river to a certain New Hampshire town, where the captain's wife proposed to live, near her relatives, until her husband returned from his voyage to the South Pacific.

The Lively Polly then returned to Gloucester Bay and anchored in a creek not far to the south of the town, where Captain Grinnidge communicated with Faber Prescott and the immediate abduction of Paul was arranged and consummated, with the success we have seen.

After passing the bar, the schooner was headed for Boston Harbor, where the cargo to be taken to South America was awaiting her.

The two boys fell asleep during the trip down the bay, and did not awake until the schooner was hauling into the wharf.

"We seem to be making fast to a dock," said Andy, after they had listened to the sounds on deck, coupled with the fact that the vessel had come to a rest. "It's some place not so very far from Glo'ster. I wonder if we'll be let go soon?"

"I've an idea that we won't get off so easy as that," replied Paul. "You may be allowed to go free, but Captain Grinnidge is bound to try and get square with me. Besides, I suspect he's entered into some arrangement with my uncle to keep me away from Glo'ster."

"What good would that do your uncle? You're bound to get back some time."

"As I'm not a mind-reader, Andy, I can't solve the conundrum. There is no telling what scheme Mr. Prescott is up to. He must realize that I can make it very hot for him after last night's developments. His only chance of avoid-

ing trouble is to keep me from communicating with Lawyer Harrison."

"He may be able to do that for a time, but not for long. The longer you're kept a prisoner the harder it will be for him when you do show up. I think he's acting like a chump."

"I never took him for a chump. He's uncommonly foxy. He used to work father for money in all kinds of ways. You see, father was very sensitive about the family honor, and my uncle took advantage of that weakness."

"He ought to have been shot. It's too bad he didn't die instead of your aunt that time you heard your mysterious death bell ring out on your roof soon after your mother's death, when the neighbors thought that either you or your father had died suddenly. If I was in your shoes I'd have that bell taken down. I shouldn't care to have such a spooky attachment to my roof-tree."

"Nonsense! I consider the bell a great curiosity."

"I don't admire your taste. It's a kind of Irish banshee. Now, if it was a bell that rang when a fellow got married, or when an heir was born, or on some other such joyful occasion, it would be doing something worth while. But to ring out only when a member of the family dies—ugh! It gives one the shivers."

Their conversation was interrupted by the removal of the scuttle cover above their heads and the appearance of the ugly features of the mate in the opening.

This was the fellow who delivered the decoy note to Paul at the academy the evening before, and he was not joyfully received by the prisoners.

The morning sunshine that streamed down over his shoulders was a far more welcome visitor.

"Well, my hearties, how are yer feelin' this mornin'?" he grinned.

"How would you feel if you were in our places?" replied Paul, coldly.

The mate chuckled at the question.

He sprang down into the hole, with a couple of strong pieces of rope in his hand.

Approaching Paul first he tied the end of one of the ropes securely about his middle and the other end he made fast to a ring in the deck.

He performed the same operation on Andy.

Then he searched their pockets and removed their jack-knives.

After that he cut their arms loose.

Their wrists were so numb that for some time there was no feeling in them.

"How d'ye like the change, eh?" he asked, with another grin.

"How long are we to be kept in this hole?" demanded Paul.

"Till to-morrow afternoon, I guess," replied the mate.

"Are we to be let go, then?"

"That's as Cap'n Grinnidge says."

"Where is the schooner now?"

"Alongside her dock."

"Where?"

"It wouldn't do ye any good to know, so I don't see no good wastin' my breath tellin' yer."

"It seems to me that Captain Grinnidge is laying a lot of trouble up for himself," said Paul.

"That's his business, not mine."

"You can tell him if he'll let us go now I'll promise not to prosecute him for what he has done so far, for I believe he's doing it to oblige my uncle. Mr. Prescott won't be able to save him when the time comes if he perseveres in his present course."

"Ye want me to tell him all that, do yer?" chuckled the mate.

"It will be to his advantage to know it."

"I'll tell him, but I don't calkerlate he'll let yer out of here till to-morrow, anyway. I s'pose yer both hungry by this time. I'll bring yer somethin' to eat soon."

Thus speaking, the mate, whose name the boys subsequently learned was Steve Cobb, sprang out of the forepeak and slammed down the scuttle after him.

From Cobb's words, the boys got the impression that they would probably be let go on the following day, and that was some satisfaction at any rate; nevertheless, neither relished the idea of remaining prisoners in that dark hole for twenty-four or thirty hours longer.

Inside of half an hour Cobb brought them each a mess of rations similar to that served out to the three men composing the crew.

While they were eating it they heard sounds on the other side of the bulkhead that separated them from the hold, which told them that the schooner was taking some kind of cargo on board.

As the morning wore away they heard the whistles of tug-boats and other marine noises so frequently that they soon understood that the schooner was moored at no small seaport.

"I'll bet we're in Boston," said Andy at length, and Paul agreed with him.

The loading went on all day up to five o'clock, with an hour's intermission at noon, when Cobb brought them some dinner.

"We're in Boston harbor, ain't we?" Paul asked him.

"What makes yer think yer are?" growled the mate, with a frown.

"From the whistles of the tugs and the other sounds we have heard."

"Ye have sharp ears I see."

"A person would have to be deaf not to hear what's going on in this neighborhood. Did you tell the captain what I said?"

"I told him."

"What did he say?" asked Paul, eagerly.

"Nothin'."

Paul was disappointed, and his face showed it.

"Been expectin' he'd let yer go I s'pose?" chuckled the mate.

"I thought he'd have sense enough to get out of a hole when he saw a good opening," replied the boy.

"Oh, ye did? I calkerlate the cap'n knows his business."

"All right," answered Paul. "It's up to him."

Cobb chuckled sardonically and presently left them alone. Night came at last, and with it their supper.

The noisy sounds along the water front gradually lulled, and by and by nothing reached their ears but the lap of the water against the schooner's sides.

The boys talked together about their prospects of release next day, and finally fell asleep.

They were awakened by the reappearance of the mate, with their breakfast.

Soon afterward the noises of the preceding day were resumed and the operations of loading the schooner were in full swing again.

Her lading was completed about the middle of the afternoon, then a tug came alongside, was made fast, her hawsers were cast off from the wharf, and the imprisoned lads were soon conscious that the vessel was underway once more.

"This doesn't look as if we were going to be let go to-day," said Andy, in a tone of disgust.

"That's right; it doesn't," answered Paul, who now began to wonder when the end of their trouble would come.

"We're being towed out of the harbor by a tug," remarked Andy.

"That's clear enough. Maybe Captain Grinnidge intends to carry us back to Glo'ster and then let us go. If he does that I won't be so hard on him, but still he'll have to square himself for his treatment of us. I don't call this a joke by any means, even if he thinks it's one. Perhaps this is his idea of getting square with me. He'll find it's a poor one in the end."

That's the way Paul was figuring up the situation, but, then, he didn't have the least suspicion of the truth.

A great surprise, however, was in store for him, as well as for poor Andy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ROAD TO THE PACIFIC.

In the course of an hour or so the tug cast off and the Lively Polly, with all her canvas set to the smacking breeze, headed down the bay toward Boston Light.

The boys so far had not suffered from the cold, as the weather, since they had been carried off from Gloucester, had been rather mild for that season of the year.

As night came on again the cold wind from the broad Atlantic began to make an icebox of the forepeak, and the chill penetrated through their overcoats, which they had not had a chance to take off since they put them on, just before leaving the academy for their visit to the Old Watch Tower on Gull Point.

"Say, we'll be turned into a pair of icicles before morning, I'm thinking," remarked Andy, slapping his legs and swinging his arms about in an effort to infuse a little warmth into his body.

"It is getting cold, for a fact," admitted Paul, adopting the same tactics.

"You can bet your life it is."

At that moment the scuttle was removed and Cobb appeared.

"The cap'n says yer to come out of this now," he said, with a chuckle.

"We've no objections," replied Paul, glad of any kind of a change.

"I calkerlate it wouldn't make no diff'rence whether yer had or not," answered the mate, as he jumped down and released them from the confinement of the ropes. "Now, then, my hearties, step lively. On deck with ye!"

Paul and Andy scrambled up without delay.

The first thing they did was to cast their eyes about the darkening seascape, eager to make out just where they were.

The schooner was bowing and rolling on the incoming surges of the big bay, with the dark sea line of the Atlantic before them.

Boston Light bore a short distance to the northeast.

"March aft," ordered Cobb. "Ye'll find the skipper on the break of the poop."

The boys walked aft and presently confronted Captain Grinnidge.

He greeted them with a sardonic grin that was particularly malicious when his one uncovered eye rested on Paul Prescott.

"Now, ye lubbers, I want ye to understand that I'm a man of few words, d'ye hear? While ye are aboard of this hooker ye've got to 'arn yer grub. If ye think I'll stand any foolin', just ye try me. Ye'll find that a rope's end or the soft side of a belayin' pin will soon put a clapper on yer jaw-tackle. Now, listen to me. This schooner is bound for Rio."

"Rio!" gasped Paul. "What do you mean?"

"Where's yer school l'arnin', you ignorant monkey? Don't ye know that Rio is in Brazil, South America?"

"Brazil!—South America!" fluttered Paul, while Andy nearly collapsed.

"That's what I said," roared Captain Grinnidge. "Now, mark me, ye've got to work yer way and stand watch same as the rest of the crew. I've shipped ye both, and by the lord Harry, if ye attempt to skulk ye'll have cause to wish ye had never been born. Now ye know what ye have to expect. Take 'em below, Cobb, and rig 'em out of the slop-chest. Then make 'em turn to and do their duty. That's all I've got to say."

Captain Grinnidge turned on his heel and walked to the wheel, while the stunned boys followed the mate into the small forecabin, where a pair of vacant berths were pointed out to them and they were told to slip out of their overcoats and shore-going suits and don the garments more suitable to their new, enforced calling.

They obeyed, in a dazed kind of way, and by that time tea was ready.

They ate what was put before them with about the same

relish that men about to be hanged partake of their last meal on earth.

All hands were then called on deck, when the ceremony of dividing the little crew into watches was gone through with.

Paul and two others formed the captain's watch; while Andy, with the remaining two, constituted the mate's watch.

The captain's watch remained on deck, while the others went below until their time came to relieve the others.

Thus the boys found themselves separated at a moment when they most desired the comfort of companionship.

Clearly, they were up against it hard.

We will pass over the severe experience that fell to their lot until the Lively Polly sighted the coast of Brazil, and passing Sugar Loaf Mountain entered the bay of Rio de Janeiro, one of the most beautiful, secure and spacious harbors in the world.

By this time they had learned, in a hard school, the rudiments of seamanship, and were able to perform their allotted duties as well as any of their companions.

Finding that kicking against their fate was of no avail, and only brought blows and abuse to them, they accepted conditions with the best grace they could, and tried to be as cheerful as their circumstances permitted.

They took comfort from the fact that it wouldn't last forever, and the experience might in the end prove of some value to them.

They found many chances to talk together, and being of the opinion that the schooner would return to Boston or Gloucester after discharging her cargo at Rio, which idea the mate had instructed the men to keep before their eyes, they did not entertain any plan for deserting the vessel at the South American port.

"When we do get back to Glo'ster there'll be something doing for Captain Grinnidge, all right," Paul told Andy more than once, and Andy guessed there would be, and hugged the anticipation to his heart, for he disliked the skipper.

It was a fine afternoon when the schooner opened up Rio de Janeiro bay, and all hands were on deck.

The passage was about a mile wide and was guarded by granite mountains.

On the whole, the boys were delighted at the chance thus afforded them to inspect a foreign port.

"There's the city, yonder," ejaculated Andy, who was leaning over the port bulwark beside Paul.

"I see it," replied his chum. "Looks funny, doesn't it—a whole cluster of white houses with vermilion roofs. Just like a painted scene in a play."

The houses crowned seven green and mound-like hills, and spread out through the intervening valleys.

The Lively Polly came to anchor in the roadstead, and then a boat was lowered and Captain Grinnidge went ashore.

Next morning the schooner was taken to a wharf and in the afternoon began discharging her cargo.

That operation was finished next day, and then Captain

Grinnidge succeeded in securing a consignment of goods for Montevideo, which would add to the profits of his trip South.

Paul and Andy supposed the cargo was intended for the United States, and no one undertook to undeceive them.

They were carefully watched while the vessel remained at her wharf, and the skipper was tickled to learn that they showed no disposition to desert the craft.

The rest of the crew were given shore leave, and they put in a similar request.

Captain Grinnidge finally permitted them to inspect the city under the guidance of the mate, who saw to it that neither got out of his sight.

At last the schooner pulled out into the stream, and next morning at daylight sailed for the mouth of the Rio de la Plata.

Paul and Andy were unpleasantly surprised when the Lively Polly's head was turned to the southward, for that course was taking them further than ever from home.

"I thought we were going back to the United States," said Paul, to Steve Cobb.

The mate grinned.

"Not yet," he answered. "The cap'n found a profitable cargo for Montevideo, and we're going their first."

Paul hunted Andy up and told him where they were bound.

"What's the odds," replied Andy. "We might as well see a little of the world while we're about it. We'll have some good yarns to tell the fellows when we get back to school. Now that we've got used to roughing it, a little extra experience won't do us any harm."

So Paul's disappointment wore off, and as Captain Grinnidge had long since got tired of knocking him around for nothing, seeing that the boy had developed into a useful as well as willing hand to whom he had nothing to pay for services rendered, he, as well as Andy, looked forward with much interest to their approaching introduction to the capital of the Republic of Uruguay.

In due time the schooner anchored off Montevideo, which is situated on a small peninsula on the north shore of the Rio de la Plata, at a point where this estuary is sixty miles wide.

The houses composing the town looked rather insignificant, for they were mostly of one story, with flat roofs.

"Gee! I don't think much of this place," said Andy. "There's only half a dozen decent-looking buildings in the whole town, as far as we can see from here. One of them seems to be a church."

Paul agreed with his chum that the general effect was rather disappointing.

On the following day the schooner hauled in to a dock and her cargo was soon out of her.

Captain Grinnidge was offered a cargo of hides to carry to New York, but declined, because he wasn't bound in that direction.

Instead, he took a load of ballast aboard, and then struck out southward once more.

"Where the dickens are we bound now?" was Paul's surprised inquiry of the mate, when he found that the Lively Polly was heading down the South American coast again.

"We're bound for the Pacific, my hearty," chuckled Steve Cobb.

"Whereabouts on the Pacific?"

"You'll have to ask the skipper," replied the mate.

Paul, however, knew better than to do that.

That night he and Andy held a pow-wow on the subject, and the only conclusion they could arrive at was that it was likely to be a long day before they saw Gloucester again.

"I can see my uncle's fine hand in this, Andy," said Paul. "When he found out that Captain Grinnidge was going on a long voyage, he paid the rascal to spirit me away, maybe in the hope that I'd fall overboard some night and thus make an opening for him to succeed to my father's property. Oh, he's foxy all right—about as slick as they come. But he's going to be disappointed. I'm not going to fall overboard if I can help myself. I'll get back some day, and then I won't do a thing to him."

"He's a big rascal, if he is your uncle," replied Andy. "I'll bet if he was in charge of the Roost at this moment he'd sit up half the night listening for that old bell on the roof to tell him, by its three strokes, that you had passed in your checks."

"Not unlikely. Maybe he's arranged with one of our neighbors to let him know if the bell should ring, so he'd have advance information of my death, and be able to put in his claim for the property all the sooner."

"I believe you."

"I am sorry, Andy, that it was through me you've got into this hobble; but I'll try to make it all right one of these days when I shall have come into actual possession of the Roost."

"Don't say a word, old chap. I'm satisfied as long as I am with you. All I regret is the worry that my unexplained absence is causing my father and mother. I'd have written home from Rio or Montevideo, only the mate gave us such a strong hint not to attempt such a thing, and kept us so closely under his eye, that we couldn't do it anyhow."

"Well, you'd better go below and take your forty winks," said Paul, "for you'll have to come on deck inside of two hours."

The schooner hugged the coast all the way down, and about six days later entered the Strait of Magellan.

A fair wind carried her through the difficult passage of 300 miles in something like twenty-four hours, and then the Lively Polly's nose was pushed out into the blue waters of the broad South Pacific.

Paul and Andy were now fast approaching the end of their journey in the schooner, though fortunately for their peace of mind they were unconscious of the fate arranged for them through the villainy of Faber Prescott and the connivance of Captain Grinnidge.

CHAPTER XIII.

WRECKED ON CORAL ISLAND.

It was now about the middle of March, a matter of three months since they left Boston Harbor, and the Lively Polly was some distance out on the Pacific.

They had seen some rough weather soon after leaving the Strait behind them, but the schooner had rode it out, like a duck.

Shortly after three o'clock one afternoon the sky grew overcast by a gathering haze, which at last shut the sun out altogether.

About this time they fell in with shifting banks of fog, blowing before the wind, the like of which Paul and Andy had never seen before.

Every now and then the wind would sweep these banks away, rolling them up before it, and for a little while there would be a clear space around the schooner for perhaps a mile or more.

Paul was on duty, and was standing his trick at the wheel, while Andy was below, laying off on his bunk.

"This is the greatest sight I ever saw," thought the boy. "At one time we're sailing across a stretch of water that looks like a big lake, with dull banks of snow all around, and then, almost without warning, we plunge headforemost into whirling clouds of mist, so thick that the leaden sea alongside can barely be seen. Andy is missing all this. Still, I don't altogether like it. Suppose while we're engulfed in the fog a big ship was to run into us, what would happen to us? I'm afraid to think of it. We'd be run down and sunk so quick that we'd hardly know what struck us. I wish the weather would clear up."

At that moment Andy came on deck.

The captain, whose turn it was to be on deck, had stepped below to take a drink, for the misty weather made the atmosphere raw and chilly.

The other two men were supposed to be keeping a sharp lookout ahead, from the bows.

The schooner at the moment was sailing across one of the open spaces, but rapidly approaching another fog bank.

"Andy," called Paul, "I wish you'd step forward and see that the men are keeping a bright lookout ahead. We'll strike another fog bank in a few minutes, and I shan't feel easy in mind till we've got on the other side of it."

"All right," replied Andy, and forward he went.

He found the men were wide awake to their job, and then remained looking ahead into the gray curtain they were about to plunge into.

It seemed to him just as if the schooner was rushing up against an impalpable kind of wall, and the sensation was rather terrifying.

Just as the Polly's bowsprit was about to pierce the mist, Andy happened to glance over the port bow, and then he saw a sight that fairly staggered him.

A big, full-rigged ship, under all sail, came out of the

fog so suddenly that it seemed as if it had sprung right into being, then and there.

The eddying foam about her cut-water testified to her great speed.

And she was bearing straight down across the port bow of the Lively Polly.

Ten seconds more and she would have crushed into the schooner's bows as though it were made of cardboard.

One of the lookout men saw her at the same moment, and he gave a gasp of fear.

His tongue close to the roof of his mouth and he couldn't utter a sound.

Andy, however, pulled himself out of his trance, and with a terrible, warning cry yelled:

"Hard a starboard, Phil! Hard a starboard for your life!"

Paul heard the ringing shout, and instantly obeyed the order, and he saw the danger at the same moment.

The captain also saw it as he sprang up the companion-ladder, and he turned the color of death, grasping the side of the opening to steady himself against the shock that seemed to be coming.

The two hands below and the mate came tumbling up in a panic, for Andy's cry rang fore and aft, like a trumpet call of danger.

The schooner's head wore around, as if she were on a pivot, so easily did she answer her helm, and to this fact was due her salvation.

She came up into the wind without a second to lose, and the monster ship passed so close to the low schooner that it seemed that one of the lookouts might have touched the swell of her sides with his hand.

It was all over in less than fifteen seconds, but those fifteen seconds had held the fate of the Lively Polly and all on board in their grasp.

Andy's quick cry and correct order, backed up by Paul's instant action, had saved the little vessel, and none recognized the fact better than Captain Grinnidge.

He looked ghastly when he turned and stared at Paul, and then the schooner plunged into the fog bank and everything became unreal looking aboard the vessel.

The schooner finally got clear of the fog belt, much to Paul's relief, and to that of all on board as well.

Before that happened, however, the watch had been changed, but Paul wouldn't go below until a clear sea opened out before the Polly.

"That was a mighty close shave we had, old chap," said Andy to him, as they stood by the starboard bulwark.

"Don't mention it, Andy. I haven't got over it yet," replied Paul, with a very serious countenance.

"I'll bet the ghostly bell ringer of the Roost was at his post with his hand on the clapper ready to give those three rings," said Andy, with an uneasy laugh.

"If he was, you and I disappointed him at the last minute. We couldn't very well have had a narrower squeak for our lives. The port of missing ships would have claimed us, and our fate would have been another ocean mystery."

Whatever Captain Grinnidge may have said to his mate about their narrow escape, he did not tender either Paul or Andy a word of commendation for their praiseworthy action in that terrible emergency.

Nor did Stephen Cobb testify his appreciation of their conduct, either.

With the four members of the crew it was different.

These chaps, not over scrupulous at the best, who had at first regarded the boys as useless additions to the schooner's complement, and had hazed them to a considerable extent, especially on passing the line or equator, had gradually become friendly with Paul and Andy.

Now realizing that the lads had saved the schooner and all on board, they were not slow in giving them due credit for the performance.

Thereafter Paul and Andy had no cause to complain of rough treatment at their hands, and all went well on board for the next two weeks.

Then the weather changed for the worse, and when Paul came on deck one morning at about half-past six, and joined Andy, who had been on duty since four o'clock, he found that the wind had increased to half a gale.

The sky was heavy and leaden, and the sea was the same color, with the dull, sodden look of molten metal.

"The mate says that the barometer indicates a heavy gale, and that this is only the beginning of it," said Andy.

"Well, I guess the Polly can ride it out all right," replied Paul, confidently. "She's already shown what she can do in dirty weather."

The gale continued to get more weight in it as the morning advanced, and when Paul was called to relieve the man at the wheel at four bells (ten o'clock) in the forenoon watch the wind was blowing hard and furious, and the seas were running very high.

The schooner, however, behaved splendidly under closely reefed canvas, rising and falling with the action of the water, like a cork.

All day long the gale continued and, if anything, getting worse, the schooner being put under bare poles, with nothing showing but a bit of jib to steady her head.

As night fell the storm increased with a sudden and heavy squall.

"Things look pretty fierce," said Andy to his chum. "This is the worst we've been up against since we came afloat. If it can blow any harder I'd like to know."

"I've read about worse storms than this, but I don't want to see one," replied Paul, with a serious look. "If one of those huge waves following us ever got aboard we'd stand a good show of being swamped."

"That's right," admitted Andy. "I don't see how we escape them."

"We escape because we always ride just out of reach on the wave ahead."

Every few minutes it seemed as if they were about to be engulfed by a great concave body of water rushed stern on, yet such is the peculiar methodical action of the sea

that the schooner always escaped the wave behind, with the regularity of clockwork.

The roar of the tempest went on all through the night, which was pitch dark.

All around the vessel were seas, ten or fifteen feet high, shining with phosphorescent crests, moving forward with their black weight of thousands of tons of solid water.

The spectacle was a terrifying one for the boys, who hardly expected to see the morning light again.

With the coming of daylight, the gale broke, the sky looked clear in patches, and the spirits of all on board revived.

"We'll come out of this all right," said Andy, breaking into a cheerful grin. "When we get back to school we'll have a whole lot to——"

"Land close aboard on the port bow!" roared the man who was on the lookout, forward. "Hard a starboard!"

The helmsman pushed against the wheel and the schooner began to slowly respond, when a heavy wave struck her bows and threw her back.

Another wave came aboard forward, while a third smashed in her starboard bulwark at the waist, and for a moment confusion reigned on the little craft.

At the same time she was carried forward with resistless speed by the water directly at the low mass ahead, which the lookout had recognized as land.

The mate sprang to assist the man at the wheel, but before their united strength could be brought to bear on the sudder chains a grating jar shook the vessel from stem to stern—it was the breaking off of the coral trees which grew below, like forests under water.

Again the schooner grated, and more harshly, then struck on a higher bunch of the coral, and then as the waves lifted her over the obstruction she struck with great violence further on and heeled over.

All hands were on deck at the moment, the captain on the poop near the mate and steersman.

A great wave came aboard diagonally amidships and swept every soul to the leeward into the yeasty foam, while the succeeding wave lifted the doomed Polly once more and cast her many yards ahead, where she now remained at the mercy of the sea, firmly fixed, fore and aft, upon a bed of coral rocks.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GRUESOME DISCOVERY.

Captain, mate and crew of the ill-fated Lively Polly had been cast into a whirling sea, bristling with jagged masses of coral, against which all but Paul and Andy were hurled inside of a very few moments, and went down, to rise no more.

A special Providence, however, seemed to guide the progress of the two boys, and, escaping the perils of the coral reef, which surrounded the entire island, with the exception of a narrow break on the opposite side, they were cast, breathless and dazed, on the sandy shore of the island

proper, a quarter of a mile from the spot on which the schooner had rested her devoted keel.

For some ten minutes Paul lay stretched out, weak and exhausted on the beach, with the water half submerging his body, as each wave rolled up on the sand.

Then he slowly pulled himself together, and finally sat up and looked around.

The first thing he noticed was Andy lying on his back a couple of yards away.

He crawled over and shook him.

"Andy, Andy!" he cried, in a husky voice.

His chum opened his eyes and looked at him in a bewildered fashion.

Then he began to strike out mechanically, as though he thought he was still in the water.

The ridiculous figure he cut on the sand, like some huge new species of crab, caused Paul to laugh outright.

"Hold on, old chap, you're not in the water any longer," he said.

Andy spit out a mouthful of wet sand and ceased moving his limbs.

Then he scrambled to his knees and the two boys gazed into each other's faces.

"Where are we, anyway?" asked Andy, spitting out more sand.

Then they got on their feet.

They saw a long, low, sloping beach covered with white sand that had been washed up on a coral foundation by the continual beating of the surf.

Up and down the length of the shore, and following in a line with the beach, was a ridge of sand hills.

A number of scrub bushes, interspersed with palm trees, grew along the crest of this ridge.

The chain of sand hills made a sudden turn in either direction, and not far from where they fell away to the westward on the level of the beach was a thick growth of underbrush, with half a dozen palms growing in the midst of it.

To the seaward lay the outer ring of coral reef, with the wreck of the Lively Polly perched upon it, her bowsprit pointing skyward.

"Are we the only ones who came ashore?" asked Andy, looking up and down the shore in a vain attempt to single out one or more of their late shipmates.

"It looks as if we're all that's left of the schooner's complement," replied Paul.

"And what shall we do here—starve?" asked Andy, dolefully.

"I hope not," answered Paul. "Let's walk down the shore."

When they reached the thicket where the palm trees sprang up they found a spring of cool water bubbling up out of the white sand.

It flowed away through a stretch of thick grass and sedge, toward the interior of the island.

"We shan't want for fresh water, at any rate," said Paul, after taking a long drink, in which he was joined by Andy.

"That's lucky," replied his companion. "Now, if we only can find some fruits or shell fish we may be able to worry along until a sail comes in sight and we are taken off."

They followed the course of the stream until they discovered that it emptied into a good-sized circular lake.

Then they started to follow the edge of the lake.

The sun was now out in an almost cloudless sky, and the late storm had fined down to a comparatively gentle breeze.

The circular spit of shore they were traversing was quite narrow, bounded by the lake on one side and the ocean, with the reef between, on the other.

It was covered with low vegetation, through which sprouted many palms.

When they reached a point nearly opposite to where they started from they found further progress cut off by a narrow inlet, which made in from the sea.

"That settles it, we can't go any further in this direction," said Paul. "The island seems to be a ring of sand and coral, with a single break at this point, the whole surrounded by an outer reef of the same shape."

"There doesn't appear to be any kind of tree but palms, and they haven't any fruit on them," said Andy.

"They're all young palms, judging from their height, and I've read that when young the center of the palm is soft, often containing a quantity of starch or sago, which I imagine ought to be good to eat. I dare say the outer reef is covered with barnacles, and they always attract fish."

"But we can't reach the outer reef without swimming, and if we swam there, how could we catch the fish?"

"A fellow can do lots of things when driven to it by necessity. Now if the schooner holds together for awhile we can swim out to her as soon as the water gets smoother, and then maybe we'll be able to get at some of her stores, though I have no great hopes of such a thing."

"S'pose we did—how could we get them ashore if the boats are stove, as I guess they are?"

"Why, we could make a rough raft out of wreckage held together by rope."

"That's so," said Andy. "Hello!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Look yonder. Blessed if there isn't a small sail-boat making direct for this island, and only one person aboard of her."

Paul followed the direction of his outstretched arm, and sure enough there was a cat-rigged boat, her mainsail bellying out to the breeze, steering right for the entrance in the outer reef.

"I wonder who that can be?" asked Andy. "Who the dickens could be navigating the wide ocean in such a cockle-shell. Why, the late storm would have sent her to the bottom in no time at all."

"I don't care who it is. He's welcome. The more the merrier, for company's sake."

They watched the stranger approach with eager interest and anticipation.

The little boat soon shot through the opening in the reef,

crossing the intervening ring of water, and drew close to the inlet.

"Why, it's a boy!" cried Andy, in astonishment.

As soon as the sailboat entered the lagoon her occupant perceived them, waved his hand several times and headed the craft for the beach.

Paul and Andy walked down to the water's edge to greet the newcomer.

"Hello!" cried Paul. "Glad to see you."

"Same here," came back the reply.

He dropped the sail and the boat ran her nose up on the beach.

The new boy stepped ashore and grasped Paul's extended hand, and then Andy's.

"My name is Jeff Waldron," he said. "Jeff is short for Jefferson. What's your names?"

"Mine is Paul Prescott, and this is my chum, Andy Owens. We were wrecked this morning on the other side of the island. Our schooner, hailing from Boston, Mass., went onto the outer reef, and all but us were lost. We were just exploring the place when we saw you coming this way. Where did you spring from, anyway, in that little boat?"

"From another island to the southeast. Got there from another island still further east. There's a whole string of these islands running for many miles. I was blown off shore from a big island to the northwest—one of the Fiji group—where my father is located as a missionary. I was trying to find my way back by easy stages, but ain't sure if I can do it. I'm real glad to meet you fellows, for it's lonesome work sailing around all by one's self."

"Well, let's cross in your boat to the other side of this lake," said Paul. "There's nothing doing on this side."

"All right. Hop aboard."

Paul and Andy stepped into the sailboat, Waldron followed, hauled up the sail and away they shot for the other side, to a point about midway of the lagoon, where a thick clump of bushes and palm trees attracted their attention, for Andy said he saw what looked to be the roof of a house there.

It didn't take them long to cross, and while Jeff Waldron was securing the boat so she wouldn't float away, Paul and Andy started for the thicket.

"There is a house there for sure," said Andy, in some excitement. "Can't you see the wall through the trees?"

"I do," replied his chum. Hello! That looks like a man, with his hand extended."

"So it does. Some shipwrecked chap like ourselves. And maybe there are more of them in the house."

"I don't like the looks of that fellow. I wonder what he's pointing at so steadily. If there are more like him they may make trouble for us. I'm going back to get Waldron's rifle that I saw in the bottom of the boat. Nothing like putting up a bold front."

Andy waited till Paul got the gun.

"He's still pointing," said Andy. "I've watched him ever since you were away and I'm willing to swear that he hasn't stirred an inch."

"That's strange. Maybe it isn't a man after all."

"Yes, it is. Don't you see his hat and cloak flying in the wind?"

"I do. He's holding something in his fist. He certainly is acting mighty strange. Just like a cigar store sign. Come on. We'll soon see what's the matter with him."

Paul and Andy advanced upon the motionless figure.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Paul, when he got close enough to look the gruesome object squarely in the face. "It's a skeleton!"

"A skeleton!" palpitated Andy, turning pale. "Oh, Lor', so it is!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOUSE OF DEATH.

It was certainly a horrible-looking object, and what was stranger still was the fact that its gloved hand held a rusted revolver, pointed straight ahead.

It looked menacing enough in good truth, but as there was no life in it the terrifying aspect of the figure was soon lost on the boys.

As Paul walked up to it his attention was attracted to an open box on the ground.

It was half full of tarnished coins, through which sprouted the noses of several fat-looking bags.

"What's this?" he ejaculated. "Money?"

At that moment Andy stepped up beside him and was equally amazed at what he saw in the box.

While they were gazing at what appeared to be a kind of treasure trove they were joined by Jeff Waldron, who, like themselves, had been momentarily staggered by the skeleton figure.

"I wonder what that scarecrow is doing here?" he asked. Then he said: "What are you looking at?"

"A box of money, apparently," replied Paul.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Waldron. "So it is."

"Hello!" cried Andy at that moment. "Just look at what's painted on the door of that house. 'A House of Death. Do Not Enter Here.' Now, wouldn't that jar you?"

"With a skull and cross-bones on top," said Paul. "Some big bluff, I guess."

"This money is no bluff, at any rate," said Andy, who was examining a handful of it. "They're foreign gold coin. I wonder how much is here? A good many thousand dollars, I'll bet. We're lucky."

"What good is it to us in our present fix?" remarked Paul.

"Every good. We don't expect to remain here all our lives. When we get back to the good old United States it will come in mighty handy."

"When we do, correct. But when will we?"

"Why can't we sail away in Waldron's boat?"

"We can, of course, if Waldron lets us. It's his boat, and we can't force ourselves on him."

"Ho!" exclaimed Waldron. "You're more than welcome to go with me; but the boat isn't large enough to more than carry us three and a supply of provisions, if we can find any on the island."

"We could manage to carry that much gold along. There isn't over \$15,000 worth in that box."

"That's \$5,000 apiece," said Andy. "I never saw that much in my life before."

"Well, let's investigate this house of death," said Paul. "We want a covered place to sleep. That ought to be just the thing."

"I'm not stuck on sleeping in a morgue," chuckled Andy.

"How do you know it's a morgue?" said Paul, advancing to the door and striking it a heavy blow with the butt of the rifle.

The door swung inward and the three boys gathered around the entrance.

A ghastly spectacle met their eyes.

No less than eight skeletons lay sprawled about in every conceivable attitude.

Their garments were nearly all rotted away, exposing the bones with grisly effect.

Clearly, they had been there for many years, showing, with the presence of the uncovered gold in the box outside, that the island had not been visited by any one in a very long time.

The boys had tumbled upon a strange and horrible mystery that betokened either murder or starvation; but presumed the latter.

The presence of the propped-up skeleton without, and the warning sign on the door didn't seem to jibe exactly with the starvation theory.

Yet if one or more companions of the dead men had escaped from the island, after doing up their companions, why hadn't they carried the gold off with them.

No matter how one tried to figure up the case the element of mystery still remained.

And the chances were it would always remain a mystery.

"We can't sleep here, that's sure," said Andy, with a look of disgust.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Paul. "There's a spade over in the corner. We'll perform a Christian duty to these poor relics and bury their bones outside, then, as a recompence for the labor, we'll take possession of the house."

"I ain't stuck on handling those bones," said Andy, with a shiver.

"Nonsense! They're entitled to a decent burial. If you don't want to help, Waldron and I'll do it, or I'll do it alone."

"Oh, if you mean to do it I won't back out of lending a hand, but I don't like the job for a cent."

Waldron showed no reluctance to assisting in the funeral operations, and so Paul got the spade and told Andy he would appoint him chief grave-digger, while Waldron and himself performed the office of undertakers.

The skeletons all went to pieces, and Paul shoveled their remains into the hole.

The grave was then filled in and a mound raised above it. Two big pieces of coral formed the head and foot stones, and the ceremony was over.

"I wish I had something to eat about this time," said Andy, wiping his forehead.

"So do I," coincided Waldron.

"And I wouldn't object to a porterhouse steak, with friend potatoes, bread and hot coffee, myself," grinned Paul.

"Hold on, Paul, you make me twice as hungry as I was," objected Andy.

"Sorry, old chap, and also that there isn't any restaurant in sight. I think we had better sail out and see what's left of the schooner. It is possible we may be able to find something in the galley to eat. That part of her, I guess, is still hanging to the reef."

"I second the motion," said Andy, with alacrity.

So the boys adjourned to the sailboat, her mainsail was hoisted and she was headed out of the lagoon into the now comparatively calm water between the island and the outer reef.

With Paul at the helm, she flew along until they sighted the wreck of the Lively Polly, just as they had last observed her.

They were able to get close alongside of her and board.

The stern of the schooner as far as the break of the trunk cabin was entirely submerged, but the balance of the craft was above the present reach of the sea.

One of her boats was still intact.

"We'll cut that loose by and by," said Paul.

The three boys then entered the small forecabin and galley.

Here, to their great satisfaction, they found more than enough to satisfy their appetites for several days.

They sat around on the bunks and made a good meal, after which they felt a great deal better.

They carried everything of an edible order on board the sailboat.

Then they cut loose and launched the quarter-boat, and filled her with such odds and ends of marine stuff as they thought worth while bringing ashore.

Tying the painter of the rowboat to the stern of the sailboat, they returned to the place in the lagoon whence they had set out.

Andy had thought to bring an old broom from the schooner and he used it to sweep out the top layer of sand in the house, after which they removed everything from the boats to the building.

Paul had also brought a small, empty meal-bag, and in this he tied up all the loose coin in the box.

During the afternoon Andy and Waldron went to the outer reef in the sailboat to try and catch a mess of fish for supper.

While they were away, Paul carried a small keg they had brought from the wreck to the spring in the thicket, and filled it with cold water.

On his return he carried it into the hut and threw it down in a corner.

It was tolerably heavy, now that it was filled with water, and when it struck the sand something happened that brought a gasp of surprise to the boy's lips.

Instead of making a dent in the soft flooring and lying there, it crashed through the sand, as through paper, and disappeared, leaving a gaping hole exposed.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"Well, if that doesn't beat anything I ever saw before," ejaculated Paul, looking at the hole. "I wonder what other mystery is connected with this house?"

Naturally he decided to investigate the matter.

So he struck a match and flashed it down into the hole.

The barrel lay less than a foot below the surface of the floor.

It was resting on an ordinary sailor's chest.

Paul stepped down into the hole and lifted the barrel out, then he examined the lid of the chest.

He found that it was not secured, and raised it without trouble.

The inside of the chest was literally packed with bags of what seemed to be money, for they were counterparts of the bags of coin lying in the open box outside.

Paul took one of them out, undid the string that secured the mouth and poured its contents out on the sandy floor.

It was gold money of a Spanish coinage of seventy-five years since.

"Whew! There must be a mint of money in that chest. A regular harvest of gold. This must be some piratical treasure trove for fair. Supposing each of these bags to contain \$4,000 or \$5,000, the top layer alone would amount to over \$100,000. At that rate there is more than half a million in gold coin here. Won't Andy and Waldron be surprised? If we can manage to get this money back to civilization the three of us will be independently rich. I suppose I'm entitled to a full half by right of discovery. That would give Andy and Waldron over \$100,000 apiece as their share. Those dead chaps we found in here must have had some connection with this money. Probably that sign was put on the door by one or more of the men who got away after perhaps murdering the others. No doubt they could not carry the money off at the time, not having the means of doing so. But they intended to come back after it later on, and put that sign on the door, and that scarecrow outside, to frighten away any chance visitor to the island. Still, why should they have left that partly filled box of money outside, exposed to any one's view? That fact seems to upset my theory of the matter. Well, I'm not going to puzzle my head over it. The question we'll have to solve is how to get away from the island and carry this treasure with us. As far as I can figure up the situation we'll be lucky if we can get safely away ourselves without trying to carry the money."

Paul returned the coins to the bag and sat down outside to await the return of his companions.

They got back in the course of an hour, with quite a bunch of fish.

"Who says we haven't been lucky?" said Andy, in high glee, exhibiting the fish.

"Yes, you've been quite lucky in your way; but for real downright good luck you are not in it even a little bit with me."

"What do you mean?" asked Andy, in a perplexed tone.

"Well, you two have spent a couple of hours capturing a dozen moderate-sized fish, while I didn't spend any time to speak of capturing half a million dollars in gold."

"What are you talking about?"

"You heard what I said, didn't you?"

"Sure I heard it, and it is a pretty good tom-fool story for you."

"If it was a tom-fool story I couldn't prove it. Now I can prove my words. Just come into the hut, both of you, with me and see what lies down in a hole which I found in a corner."

He led the way and they followed, wonderingly.

When Paul showed them the contents of the bag he had taken from the chest, and then the chest itself, the two lads nearly had the blind staggers.

Andy executed a kind of Indian war dance.

"What are you getting so excited about, Andy," said Waldron. "We don't come in on this. Prescott found the stuff, and, by rights, it all belongs to him."

Then Andy looked glum.

"No," answered Paul. "I'm going to divide up. Say, one-half for me and a quarter each for you two. Is that satisfactory?"

Andy and Waldron both declared that Paul was too generous, seeing that he had found the chest of money without any help from them.

"That don't make any difference. The money in the box outside is to be divided in even thirds; that in the chest in the hole just as I told you. Now then, we've got to put our heads together in order to see how we can manage to get the money away with us from the island. Remember that half a million in gold weighs pretty considerably. Why, that \$15,000 outside is a pretty good weight of itself for one man to carry any distance."

The boys postponed further consideration of the subject until they had cooked and eaten their supper, then they took the matter up again.

The result of their deliberation failed to produce any practical results, and the matter was abandoned for the time being.

Next day, under Paul's directions, they visited the wreck and brought away a lot of boards, together with the carpenter kit.

During the afternoon they employed themselves making a lot of small boxes to hold four bags each of the coin.

Altogether, it took fifty boxes to hold all the money.

Next morning, to their surprise and delight, a brig anchored off the island and a boat came ashore, with the second mate of the brig, to look for fresh water.

The newcomers were surprised to find the three boys on the island.

Paul explained their presence there and pointed out the fresh water spring to the mate.

The boys learned that the brig was en route from Sidney, Australia, to San Francisco, with a cargo of coal.

Paul, after a conference with the mate, went on board the brig to see the captain and try to arrange for their passage to California.

He had no great trouble in coming to an agreement when he stated that he and Andy were willing, and fairly competent, to work their passage before the mast, while it was agreed that Waldron should act as cabin boy, without pay.

Then came the question of securing transportation of the fifty small, heavy boxes, the character of whose contents Paul would not state.

The captain agreeing to take them along, they were carried off in four trips of the sailboat.

The quarter-boat and the sailboat were then turned over to the captain, and as soon as her water-casks had been replenished the brig hauled up her anchor and continued on her voyage to the Pacific Coast of the United States, where she duly arrived, without encountering any particularly rough weather.

The first thing that Paul did was to telegraph to Lawyer Harrison, while Andy wired his parents.

The next thing was to dispose of the old Spanish gold coin, which they succeeded in getting rid of to the sub-treasury of the United States at its current value of old gold.

It netted them a little over half a million, of which Paul took an order on Boston for \$250,000; Andy an order for \$125,000, while Jeff Waldron received his share in government notes.

Paul and his chum parted from Waldron, who wanted to rejoin his father as soon as possible, and took a train for the East.

Lawyer Harrison and Andy's father were on hand at the Boston & Albany depot at Boston to meet the boys on their arrival in that city.

Almost Paul's first eager inquiry was about Dolly Curtis.

Mr. Harrison made Paul feel good by telling him that Dolly had returned to the Roost a month after her disappearance.

Paul and Lawyer Harrison, with Andy and his father, took a train for Gloucester on the afternoon of the day of their arrival in Boston.

The former two lost no time in going out to the Old Watch Tower to see if the missing will still reposed inside of the crack in the stone flooring of the second story of the tower.

To their intense satisfaction the will was there and was easily recovered.

Mr. Harrison recognized it as the one he had drawn up for Paul's father.

"I guess my uncle will be rather surprised to see me turn

up safe and sound, when he probably imagines that I am many thousands of miles away on board the late schooner Lively Polly," chuckled Paul.

"He has laid himself liable to arrest and prosecution for aiding and abetting in your abduction," said the lawyer; "as well as conspiracy in the matter of your father's will. It remains with you to say whether I shall proceed against him at once. He is almost certain to be convicted and sent to State prison."

"No," replied Paul, "it would be against my dead father's wishes to bring this disgrace on the family name. Call on him and tell him that his treachery has been brought to light and that his game is up for good and all."

"Very well," replied Mr. Harrison.

Faber Prescott was located by the lawyer in Boston.

We will not refer to the interview that took place between them.

It is enough to know that Faber and his son, after receiving their legacies under the will, disappeared and were not again heard of by Paul or Mr. Harrison.

They confessed that they had hired a man to ring the bell in the tower on the night Paul's father died, and it was concluded that the former ringing of the bell had been done by human hands.

Paul duly entered Harvard College a year later than the time originally set, and Andy Owens went with him.

Both graduated together at the end of the four years' course, at the age of twenty-three.

Immediately afterward there was a wedding at the Roost, when Dolly Curtis became mistress of the place, much to the satisfaction of the old housekeeper, who had come to regard her as an adopted and much-loved daughter.

Paul retained all the old servants, as a matter of course, over whom Tom Hazard reigned as major domo or steward, and the property was much improved, while its young owner took his place as the richest and most important resident of West Newbury, all of which was due to his discovery of A HARVEST OF GOLD; OR THE BURIED TREASURE OF CORAL ISLAND.

THE END.

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